

THE
EARTHLY PARADISE

A POEM.

BY

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AUTHOR OF THE LIFE AND DEATH OF JASON.

POPULAR EDITION.

IN TEN PARTS.

(No 342)

PART IV.

THE LADY OF THE LAND.

THE SON OF CRÆSUS.

THE WATCHING OF THE FALCON.

PYGMALION AND THE IMAGE.

OGIER THE DANE.

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SANGE felt the wanderers at his tale, for now
Their old desires it seemed once more to show
Unto their altered hearts, when now the rest,
Most surely coming, of all things seemed best ;—
—Unless, by death perchance they yet might gain
Some space to try such deeds as now in vain
They heard of amidst stories of the past ;
Such deeds as they for that wild hope had cast
From out their hands—they sighed to think of it,
And how as deedless men they there must sit.

Yet, with the measured falling of that rhyme
Mingled the lovely sights and glorious time,
Whereby, in spite of hope long past away,
In spite of knowledge growing day by day
Of lives so wasted, in despite of death,
With sweet content that eve they drew their breath,
And scarce their own lives seemed to touch them more
Than that dead Queen's beside Bœbeis' shore ;
Bitter and sweet so mingled in them both,
Their lives and that old tale, they had been loth,
Perchance, to have them told another way.—
So passed the sun from that fair summer day.

JUNE drew unto its end, the hot bright days
Now gat from men as much of blame as praise,
As rainless still they passed, without a cloud,
And growing grey at last, the barley bowed
Before the south-east wind. On such a day
These folk amid the trellised roses lay,
And careless for a little while at least,
Crowned with the mingled blossoms held their feast :
Nor did the garden lack for younger folk,
Who cared no more for burning summer's yoke
Than the sweet breezes of the April-tide ;
But through the thick trees wandered far and wide
From sun to shade, and shade to sun again,
Until they deemed the elders would be fain
To hear the tale, and shadows longer grew :
Then round about the grave old men they drew,
Both youths and maidens ; and beneath their feet
The grass seemed greener, and the flowers more sweet
Unto the elders, as they stood around.

So through the calm air soon arose the sound
Of one old voice as now a Wanderer spoke.
" O friends, and ye, fair loving gentle folk,

Would I could better tell a tale to-day ;
But hark to this, which while our good ship lay
Within the Weser such a while ago,
A Fleming told me, as we sat alone
One Sunday evening in the Rose-garland,
And all the other folk were gone a-land
After their pleasure, like sea-faring men.
Surely I deem it no great wonder then
That I remember everything he said,
Since from that Sunday eve strange fortune led
That keel and me on such a weary way—
Well, at the least it serveth you to-day.”

THE LADY OF THE LAND.

ARGUMENT.

A CERTAIN Man having landed on an Island in the Greek Sea, found there a beautiful damsel, whom he would fain have delivered from a strange and dreadful doom, but failing herein, he died soon afterwards.

IT happened once, some men of Italy
Midst the Greek islands went a sea-roving,
And much good fortune had they on the sea :
Of many a man they had the ransoming,
And many a chain they gat, and goodly thing ;
And midst their voyage to an isle they came,
Whereof my story keepeth not the name.

Now though but little was there left to gain,
Because the richer folk had gone away,
Yet since by this of water they were fain
They came to anchor in a land-locked bay,
Whence in a while some went ashore to play,
Going but lightly armed in twos or threes,
For midst that folk they feared no enemies.

And of these fellows that thus went ashore,
One was there who left all his friends behind ;
Who going inland ever more and more,
And being left quite alone, at last did find
A lonely valley sheltered from the wind,
Wherein, amidst an ancient cypress wood,
A long-deserted ruined castle stood.

The wood, once ordered in fair grove and glade,
With gardens overlooked by terraces,
And marble-paved pools for pleasure made,
Was tangled now, and choked with fallen trees ,
And he who went there, with but little ease
Must stumble by the stream's side, once made meet
For tender women's dainty wandering feet.

The raven's croak, the low wind choked and drear,
The baffled stream, the grey wolf's doleful cry,
Were all the sounds that manner could hear,
As through the wood he wandered painfully ,
But as unto the house he drew anigh,
The pillars of a ruined shrine he saw,
The once fair temple of a fallen law.

No image was there left behind to tell
Before whose face the knees of men had bowed ;
An altar of black stone, of old wrought well,
Alone beneath a ruined roof now showed
The goal whereto the folk were wont to crowd,

Seeking for things forgotten long ago,
Praying for heads long ages laid a-low.

Close to the temple was the castle-gate,
Doorless and crumbling ; there our fellow turned,
Trembling indeed at what might chance to wait
The prey entrapped, yet with a heart that burned
To know the most of what might there be learned,
And hoping somewhat too, amid his fear,
To light on such things as all men hold dear.

Noble the house was, nor seemed' built for war,
But rather like the work of other days,
When men, in better peace than now they are,
Had leisure on the world around to gaze,
And noted well the past times' changing ways ;
And fair with sculptured stories it was wrought,
By lapse of time unto dim ruin brought.

Now as he looked about on all these things,
And strove to read the mouldering histories,
Above the door an image with wide wings,
Whose unclad limbs a serpent seemed to seize,
He dimly saw, although the western breeze,
And years of biting frost and biting rain,
Had made the carver's labour well-nigh vain.

But this, though perished sore, and worn away,
He noted well, because it seemed to be,

After the fashion of another day,
Some great man's badge of war, or armoury,
And round it a carved wreath he seemed to see :
But taking note of these things, at the last
The mariner beneath the gateway passed.

And there a lovely cloistered court he found,
A fountain in the midst o'erthrown and dry,
And in the cloister briers twining round
The slender shafts ; the wondrous imagery
Outworn by more than many years gone by,
Because the country people, in their fear
Of wizardry, had wrought destruction here ;

And piteously these fair things had been maimed :
There stood great Jove, lacking his head of might ;
Here was the archer, swift Apollo, lamed ;
The shapely limbs of Venus hid from sight
By weeds and shards ; Diana's ankles light
Bound with the cable of some coasting ship ;
And rusty nails through Helen's maddening lip.

Therefrom unto the chambers did he pass,
And found them fair still, midst of their decay,
Though in them now no sign of man there was,
And everything but stone had passed away
That made them lovely in that vanished day ;
Nay, the mere walls themselves would soon be gone
And nought be left but heaps of mouldering stone.

But he, when all the place he had gone o'er,
And with much trouble clomb the broken stair,
And from the topmost turret seen the shore
And his good ship drawn up at anchor **there**,
Came down again, and found a crypt most fair
Built wonderfully beneath the greatest hall,
And there he saw a door within the wall,

Well-hinged, close shut ; nor was there in that place
Another on its hinges, therefore he
Stood there and pondered for a little space,
And thought, "Perchance some marvel I shall see,
For surely here some dweller there must be,
Because this door seems whole, and new, and sound,
While nought but ruin I can see around."

So with that word, moved by a strong desire,
He tried the hasp, that yielded to his hand,
And in a strange place, lit as by a fire
Unseen but near, he presently did stand ;
And by an odorous breeze his face was fanned,
As though in some Arabian plain he stood,
Anigh the border of a spice-tree wood.

'He moved not for awhile, but looking round,
He wondered much to see the place so fair,
Because, unlike the castle above ground,
No pillager or wrecker had been there ;
It seemed that time had passed on elsewhere,

Nor laid a finger on this hidden place,
Rich with the wealth of some forgotten race.

With hangings, fresh as when they left the loom,
The walls were hung a space above the head,
Slim ivory chairs were set about the room,
And in one corner was a dainty bed,
That seemed for some fair queen appalled ;
And marble was the worst stone of the floor,
'That with rich Indian webs was covered o'er.

The wanderer trembled when he saw all this,
Because he deemed by magic it was wrought ;
Yet in his heart a longing for some bliss,
Whereof the hard and changing world knows nought,
Arose and urged him on, and dimmed the thought
That there perchance some devil lurked to slay
The heedless wanderer from the light of day.

Over against him was another door
Set in the wall, so, casting fear aside,
With hurried steps he crossed the varied floor,
And there again the silver latch he tried
And with no pain the door he opened wide,
And entering the new chamber cautiously
The glory of great heaps of gold could see.

Upon the floor uncounted medals lay,
Like things of little value ; here and there

Stood golden caldrons, that might well outweigh
The biggest midst an emperor's copper ware,
And golden cups were set on tables fair,
Themselves of gold ; and in all hollow things
Were stored great gems, worthy the crowns of kings.

The walls and roof with gold were overlaid,
And precious raiment from the wall hung down ;
The fall of kings that treasure might have stayed,
Or gained some longing conqueror great renown,
Or built again some god-destroyed old town ;
What wonder, if this plunderer of the sea
Stood gazing at it long and dizzily ?

But at the last his troubled eyes and dazed
He lifted from the glory of that gold,
And then the image, that well-nigh erased
Over the castle-gate he did behold,
Above a door well wrought in coloured gold
Again he saw ; a naked girl with wings
Enfolded in a serpent's scaly rings.

And even as his eyes were fixed on it
A woman's voice came from the other side,
And through his heart strange hopes began to flit
That in some wondrous land he might abide
Not dying, master of a deathless bride,
So o'er the gold he scarcely now could see
He went, and passed this last door eagerly.

'Then in a room he stood wherein there was
A marble bath, whose brimming water yet
Was scarcely still ; a vessel of green glass
Half full of odorous ointment was there set
Upon the topmost step that still was wet,
And jewelled shoes and women's dainty gear,
Lay cast upon the varied pavement near.

In one quick glance these things his eyes did see,
But speedily they turned round to behold
Another sight, for throned on ivory
There sat a girl, whose dripping tresses rolled
On to the floor in waves of gleaming gold,
Cast back from such a form as, erewhile shown
To one poor shepherd, lighted up Troy town.

Naked she was, the kisses of her feet
Upon the floor a dying path had made
From the full bath unto her ivory seat ;
In her right hand, upon her bosom laid,
She held a golden comb, a mirror weighed
Her left hand down, aback her fair head lay
Dreaming awake of some long vanished day.

Her eyes were shut, but she seemed not to sleep,
Her lips were murmuring things unheard and low,
Or sometimes twitched as though she needs must weep
Though from her eyes the tears refused to flow,
And oft with heavenly red her cheek did glow,

As if remembrance of some half-sweet shame
Across the web of many memories came.

There stood the man, scarce daring to draw breath
For fear the lovely sight should fade away ;
Forgetting heaven, forgetting life and death,
Trembling for fear lest something he should say
Unwitting, lest some sob should yet betray
His presence there, for to his eager eyes
Already did the tears begin to rise.

But as he gazed she moved, and with a sigh
Bent forward, dropping down her golden head ;
" Alas, alas ! another day gone by,
Another day and no soul come," she said ;
" Another year, and still I am not dead !"
And with that word once more her head she raised,
And on the trembling man with great eyes gazed.

Then he imploring hands to her did reach,
And toward her very slowly 'gan to move
And with wet eyes her pity did beseech,
And seeing her about to speak he strove
From trembling lips to utter words of love ;
But with a look she stayed his doubtful feet,
And made sweet music as their eyes did meet.

For now she spoke in gentle voice and clear,
Using the Greek tongue that he knew full well ;

"What man art thou, that thus hast wandered here,
And found this lonely chamber where I dwell?
Beware, beware! for I have many a spell;
If greed of power and gold have led thee on,
Not lightly shall this untold wealth be won.

"But if thou com'st here, knowing of my tale,
In hope to bear away my body fair,
Stout must thine heart be, nor shall that avail
If thou a wicked heart in thee dost bear;
So once again I bid thee to beware,
Because no base man things like this may see,
And live thereafter long and happily."

"Lady," he said, "in Florence is my home,
And in my city noble is my name;
Neither on peddling voyage am I come,
But, like my fathers, bent to gather fame;
And though thy face has set my heart a-flame
Yet of thy story nothing do I know,
But here have wandered heedlessly enow.

"But since the sight of thee mine eyes did bless,
What can I be but thine? what wouldst thou have?
From those thy words, I deem from some distress
By deeds of mine thy dear life I might save;
O then, delay not! if one ever gave
His life to any, mine I give to thee;
Come, tell me what the price of love must be?

“Swift death, to be with thee a day and night
And with the earliest dawning to be slain ?
Or better, a long year of great delight,
And many years of misery and pain ?
Or worse, and this poor hour for all my gain ?
A sorry merchant am I on this day,
E'en as thou wilt so must I obey.”

She said, “What brave words ! nought divine am I,
But an unhappy and unheard-of maid
Compelled by evil fate and destiny
To live, who long ago should have been laid
Under the earth within the cypress shade.
Hearken awhile, and quickly shalt thou know
What deed I pray thee to accomplish now.

“God grant indeed thy words are not for nought !
Then shalt thou save me, since for many a day
To such a dreadful life I have been brought :
Nor will I spare with all my heart to pay
What man soever takes my grief away ;
Ah ! I will love thee, if thou lovest me
But well enough my saviour now to be.

“My father lived a many years agone
Lord of this land, master of all cunning,
Who ruddy gold could draw from out grey stone,
And gather wealth from many an unçouth thing,
He made the wilderness rejoice and sing,

And such a leech he was that none could say
Without his word what soul should pass away.

“Unto Diana such a gift he gave,
Goddess above, below, and on the earth,
That I should be her virgin and her slave
From the first hour of my most wretched birth ;
Therefore my life had known but little mirth
When I had come unto my twentieth year
And the last time of hallowing drew anear.

“So in her temple had I lived and died
And all would long ago have passed away,
But ere that time came, did strange things betide,
Whereby I am alive unto this day ;
Alas, the bitter words that I must say !
Ah ! can I bring my wretched tongue to tell
How I was brought unto this fearful hell.

“A queen I was, what gods I knew I loved,
And nothing evil was there in my thought,
And yet by love my wretched heart was moved
Until to utter ruin I was brought !
Alas ! thou sayest our gods were vain and nought,
Wait, wait, till thou hast heard this tale of mine,
Then shalt thou think them devilish or divine.

“Hearken ! in spite of father and of vow
I loved a man ; but for that sin I think

Men had forgiven me—yea, yea, even thou ;
But from the gods the full cup must I drink,
And into misery unheard of sink,
Tormented when their own names are forgot,
And men must doubt if they e'er lived or not.

“Glorious my lover was unto my sight,
Most beautiful,—of love we grew so fain
That we at last agreed, that on a night
We should be happy, but that he were slain
Or shut in hold, and neither joy nor pain
Should else forbid that hoped-for time to be ;
So came the night that made a wretch of me.

“Ah ! well do I remember all that night,
When through the window shone the orb of June,
And by the bed flickered the taper's light,
Whereby I trembled, gazing at the moon :
Ah me ! the meeting that we had, when soon
Into his strong, well-trusted arms I fell,
And many a sorrow we began to tell.

“Ah me ! what parting on that night we had !
I think the story of my great despair
A little while might merry folk make sad ;
For, as he swept away my yellow hair
To make my shoulder and my bosom bare,
I raised mine eyes, and shuddering could behold
A shadow cast upon the bed of gold :

“Then suddenly was quenched my hot desire
And he untwined his arms ; the moon so pale .
A while ago, seemed changed to blood and fire,
And yet my limbs beneath me did not fail,
And neither had I strength to cry or wail,
But stood there helpless, bare, and shivering,
With staring eyes still fixed upon the thing.

“Because the shade that on the bed of gold
The changed and dreadful moon was throwing down
Was of Diana, whom I did behold,
With knotted hair, and shining girt-up gown,
And on the high white brow, a deadly frown
Bent upon us, who stood scarce drawing breath,
Striving to meet the horrible sure death.

“No word at all the dreadful goddess said,
But soon across my feet my lover lay,
And well indeed I knew that he was dead ;
And would that I had died on that same day !
For in a while the image turned away,
And without words my doom I understood,
And felt a horror change my natural blood.

“And there I fell, and on the floor I lay
By the dead man, till daylight came on me,
And not a word thenceforward could I say
For three years, till of grief and misery,
The lingering pest, the cruel enemy, .

My father and his folk were dead and gone,
And in this castle I was left alone :

“ And then the doom foreseen upon me fell,
For Queen Diana did my body change
Into a fork-tongued dragon flesh and fell,
And through the island nightly do I range,
Or in the green sea mate with monsters strange,
When in the middle of the moonlit night
The sleepy mariner I do afright.

“ But all day long upon this gold I lie
Within this place, where never mason’s hand
Smote trowel on the marble noisily ;
Drowsy I lie, no folk at my command,
Who once was called the Lady of the Land ;
Who might have bought a kingdom with a kiss,
Yea, half the world with such a sight as this.”

And therewithal, with rosy fingers light,
Backward her heavy-hanging hair she threw,
To give her naked beauty more to sight ;
But when, forgetting all the things he knew,
Maddened with love unto the prize he drew,
She cried, “ Nay, wait ! for wherefore wilt thou die,
Why should we not be happy, thou and I ?

“ Wilt thou not save me ? once in every year
This rightful form of mine that thou dost see

By favour of the goddess have I here
From sunrise unto sunset given me,
That some brave man may end my misery.
And thou—art thou not brave? can thy heart fail,
Whose eyes e'en now are weeping at my tale?

“Then listen! when this day is overpast,
A fearful monster shall I be again,
And thou mayst be my saviour at the last,
Unless, once more, thy words are nought and vain;
If thou of love and sovereignty art fain,
Come thou next morn, and when thou seest here
A hideous dragon, have thereof no fear,

“But take the loathsome head up in thine hands,
And kiss it, and be master presently
Of twice the wealth that is in all the lands,
From Cathay to the head of Italy;
And master also, if it pleaseth thee,
Of all thou praisest as so fresh and bright,
Of what thou callest crown of all delight.

“Ah! with what joy then shall I see again
The sunlight on the green grass and the trees,
And hear the clatter of the summer rain,
And see the joyous folk beyond the seas.
Ah, me! to hold my child upon my knees,
After the weeping of unkindly tears,
And all the wrongs of these four hundred years.

“Go now, go quick! leave this grey heap of stone;
And from thy glad heart think upon thy way,
How I shall love thee—yea, love thee alone,
That bringest me from dark death unto day;
For this shall be thy wages and thy pay;
Unheard-of wealth, unheard-of love is near,
If thou hast heart a little dread to bear.”

Therewith she turned to go; but he cried out,
“Ah! wilt thou leave me then without one kiss,
To slay the very seeds of doubt and fear,
That glad to-morrow may bring certain bliss?
Hast thou forgotten how love lives by this,
The memory of some hopeful close embrace,
Low whispered words within some lonely place?”

But she, when his bright glittering eyes she saw,
And burning cheeks, cried out, “Alas, alas!
Must I be quite undone, and wilt thou draw
A worse fate on me than the first one was?
O haste thee from this fatal place to pass!
Yet, ere thou goest, take this, lest thou shouldst deem
Thou hast been fooled by some strange midday dream.”

So saying, blushing like a new-kissed maid,
From off her neck a little gem she drew,
That, 'twixt those snowy rose-tinged hillocks laid,
The secrets of her glorious beauty knew;
And ere he well perceived what she would do,

She touched his hand, the gem within it lay,
And, turning, from his sight she fled away.

Then at the doorway where her rosy heel
Had glanced and vanished, he awhile did stare,
And still upon his hand he seemed to feel
The varying kisses of her fingers fair ;
Then turned he toward the dreary crypt and bare,
And dizzily throughout the castle passed,
Till by the ruined fane he stood at last.

Then weighing still the gem within his hand,
He stumbled backward though the cypress wood,
Thinking the while of some strange lovely land,
Where all his life should be most fair and good ;
Till on the valley's wall of hills he stood,
And slowly thence passed down unto the bay
Red with the death of that bewildering day.

THE next day came, and he, who all the night
Had ceaselessly been turning in his bed,
Arose and clad himself in armour bright,
And many a danger he remembered ;
Storming of towns, lone sieges full of dread,
That with renown his heart had borne him through
And this thing seemed a little thing to do.

So on he went, and on the way he thought
Of all the glorious things of yesterday,
Nought of the price whereat they must be bought,
But ever to himself did softly say,
“No roaming now, my wars are passed away,
No long dull days devoid of happiness,
When such a love my yearning heart shall bless.”

Thus to the castle did he come at last,
But when unto the gateway he drew near,
And underneath its ruined arch way passed
Into the court, a strange noise did he hear,
And through his heart there shot a pang of fear,
‘Trembling, he gat his sword into his hand,
And midmost of the cloisters took his stand.

But for a while that unknown noise increased
A rattling, that with strident roars did blend,
And whining moans ; but suddenly it ceased,
A fearful thing stood at the cloister’s end,
And eyed him for a while, then ‘gan to wend
Adown the cloisters, and began again
‘That rattling, and the moan like fiends in pain.

And as it came on towards him, with its teeth
The body of a slain goat did it tear,
The blood whereof in its hot jaws did scethe,
And on its tongue he saw the smoking hair ;
Then his heart sank, and standing trembling there,

'Throughout his mind wild thoughts and fearful ran,
"Some fiend she was," he said, "the bane of man."

Yet he abode her still, although his blood
Curdled within him : the thing dropped the goat,
And creeping on, came close to where he stood,
And raised its head to him, and wrinkled throat,
Then he cried out and wildly at her smote,
Shutting his eyes, and turned and from the place
Ran swiftly, with a white and ghastly face.

But little things rough stones and tree-trunks seemed,
And if he fell, he rose and ran on still ;
No more he felt his hurts than if he dream'd,
He made no stay for valley or steep hill,
Heedless he dashed through many a foaming rill,
Until he came unto the ship at last
And with no word into the deep hold passed.

Meanwhile the dragon, seeing him clean gone,
Followed him not, but crying horribly,
Caught up within her jaws a block of stone
And ground it into powder, then turned she,
With cries that folk could hear far out at sea,
And reached the treasure set apart of old,
To brood above the hidden heaps of gold.

Yet was she seen again on many a day
By some half-waking mariner, or herd,

Playing amid the ripples of the bay,
Or on the hills making all things afeard,
Or in the wood, that did that castle gird,
But never any man again durst go
To seek her woman's form, and end her woe.

As for the man, who knows what things he bore?
What mournful faces peopled the sad night,
What wailings vexed him with reproaches sore,
What images of that nigh-gained delight!
What dreamed caresses from soft hands and white,
Turning to horrors ere they reached the best,
What struggles vain, what shame, what huge unrest?

No man he knew, three days he lay and raved,
And cried for death, until a lethargy
Fell on him, and his fellows thought him saved;
But on the third night he awoke to die;
And at Byzantium doth his body lie
Between two blossoming pomegranate trees.
Within the churchyard of the Genoese.

A MOMENT'S silence as his tale had end,
And then the wind of that June night did blend
Their varied voices, as of that and this
They fell to talk : of those fair islands' bliss
They knew in other days, of hope they had
To live there long an easy life and glad.
With nought to vex them ; and the younger men
Began to nourish strange dreams even then
Of sailing east, as these had once sailed west ;
Because the story of that luckless quest
With hope, not fear, had filled their joyous hearts
And made them dream of new and noble parts
That they might act ; of raising up the name
Their fathers bore, and winning boundless fame.

These too with little patience seemed to hear,
That story end with shame and grief and fear ;
A little thing the man had had to do,
They said, if longing burned within him so.
But at their words the older men must bow
Their heads, and, smiling, somewhat thoughtful grow,
Remembering well how fear in days gone by
Had dealt with them, and poisoned wretchedly
Good days, good deeds, and longings for all good :
Yet on the evil times they would not brood,
But sighing, strove to raise the weight of years,
And no more memory of their hopes and fears
They nourished, but such gentle thoughts as fed
The pensiveness the lovely season bred.

JULY.

F AIR was the morn to-day, the blossom's scent
Floated across the fresh grass, and the bees
With low vexed song from rose to lily went,
A gentle wind was in the heavy trees,
And thine eyes shone with joyous memories ;
Fair was the early morn, and fair wert thou,
And I was happy—Ah, be happy now !

Peace and content without us, love within
That hour there was, now thunder and wild rain,
Have wrapped the cowering world, and foolish sin,
And nameless pride, have made us wise in vain ;
Ah, love ! although the morn shall come again,
And on new rose-buds the new sun shall smile,
Can we regain what we have lost meanwhile ?

E'en now the west grows clear of storm and threat,
But midst the lightning did the fair sun die—
—Ah, he shall rise again for ages yet,
He cannot waste his life—but thou and I—
Who knows if next morn this felicity
My lips may feel, or if thou still shalt live
This seal of love renewed once more to give ?

WITHIN a lovely valley, watered well
With flowery streams, the July feast befell,
And there within the Chief-priest's fair abode
They cast aside their trouble's heavy load,
Scarce made aweary by the sultry day.
The earth no longer laboured ; shaded lay
The sweet-breathed kine, across the sunny vale,
From hill to hill the wandering rook did sail,
Lazily croaking, midst his dreams of spring,
Nor more awake the pink-foot dove did cling
Unto the beech-bough, murmuring now and then ;
All rested but the restless sons of men
And the great sun that wrought this happiness,
And all the vale with fruitful hopes did bless.

So in a marble chamber bright with flowers,
The old men feasted through the fresher hours,
And at the hottest time of all the day
When now the sun was on his downward way,
Sat listening to a tale an elder told,
New to his fathers while they yet did hold
The cities of some far-off Grecian isle,
Though in the heavens the cloud of force and guile
Was gathering dark that sent them o'er the sea
To win new lands for their posterity.

THE SON OF CRÆSUS.

ARGUMENT.

CRÆSUS, king of Lydia, dreamed that he saw his Son slain by an iron weapon, and though by every means he strove to avert this doom from him, yet thus it happened, for his Son was slain by the hand of the man who seemed least of all likely to do the deed.

OF Cræsus tells my tale, a king of old
In Lydia, ere the Mede fell on the land,
A man made mighty by great heaps of gold,
Feared for the myriads strong of heart and hand
That 'neath his banners wrought out his command,
And though his latter ending fell to ill,
Yet first of every joy he had his fill.

Two sons he had, and one was dumb from birth;
'The other one, that Atys had to name,
Grew up a fair youth, and of might and worth,
And well it seemed the race wherefrom he came
From him should never get reproach or shame:
But yet no stroke he struck before his death,
In no war-shout he spent his latest breath.

Now Cræsus, lying on his bed anight,
Dreamed that he saw this dear son lying low,
And folk lamenting he was slain outright,
And that some iron thing had dealt the blow ;
By whose hand guided he could nowise know,
Or if in peace by traitors it were done,
Or in some open war not yet begun.

Three times one night this vision broke his sleep,
So that at last he rose up from his bed,
That he might ponder how he best might keep
The threatened danger from so dear a head ;
And, since he now was old enough to wed,
The King sent men to search the lands around,
Until some matchless maiden should be found ;

That in her arms this Atys might forget
The praise of men, and fame of history,
Whereby full many a field has been made wet
With blood of men, and many a deep green sea
Been reddened therewithal, and yet shall be ;
That her sweet voice might drown the people's praise,
Her eyes make bright the uneventful days.

So when at last a wonder they had brought,
From some sweet land down by the ocean's rim,
Than whom no fairer could by man be thought,
And ancient dames, scanning her limb by limb,
Had said that she was fair enough for him,

To her was Atys married with much show,
And looked to dwell with her in bliss enow.

And in meantime afield he never went,
Either to hunting or the frontier war,
No dart was cast, nor any engine bent
Anigh him, and the Lydian men afar
Must rein their steeds, and the bright blossoms mar
If they have any lust of tourney now,
And in far meadows must they bend the bow.

And also through the palace evervwhere
The swords and spears were taken from the wall
That long with honour had been hanging there,
And from the golden pillars of the hall ;
Lest by mischance some sacred blade should fall,
And in its falling bring revenge at last
For many a fatal battle overpast.

And every day King Cræsus wrought with care
To save his dear son from that threatened end,
And many a beast he offered up with prayer
Unto the gods, and much of wealth did spend,
That they so prayed might yet perchance defend
That life, until at least that he were dead,
With earth laid heavy on his unseeing head.

But in the midst even of the wedding feast
There came a man, who by the golden hall

Sat down upon the steps, and man or beast
He heeded not, but there against the wall
He leaned his head, speaking no word at all,
Till, with his son and son's wife, came the King,
And then unto his gown the man did cling.

"What man art thou?" the King said to him then,
"That in such guise thou prayest on thy knee,
Hast thou some fell foe here among my men?
Or hast thou done an ill deed unto me?
Or has thy wife been carried over sea?
Or hast thou on this day great need of gold?
Or say, why else thou now art grown so bold."

"O King," he said, "I ask no gold to-day,
And though indeed thy greatness drew me here,
No wrong have I that thou couldst wipe away,
And nought of mine the pirate folk did bear
Across the sea; none of thy folk I fear:
But all the gods are now mine enemies,
Therefore I kneel before thee on my knees.

"For as with mine own brother on a day
Within the running place at home I played,
Unwittingly I smote him in such way
That dead upon the green grass he was laid;
Half-dead myself I fled away dismayed,
Wherefore I pray thee help me in my need,
And purify my soul of this sad deed.

“ If of my name and country thou wouldst know,
In Phrygia yet my father is a king,
Gordius, the son of Midas, rich enow
In corn and cattle, golden cup and ring;
And mine own name before I did this thing
Was called Adrastus, whom, in street and hall,
The slayer of his brother men now call.”

“ Friend,” said the King, “ have thou no fear of me;
For though, indeed, I am right happy now,
Yet well I know this may not always be,
And I may chance some day to kneel full low.
And to some happy man mine head to bow
With prayers to do a greater thing than this,
Dwell thou with us, and win again thy bliss.

“ For in this city men in sport and play
Forget the trouble that the gods have sent;
Who therewithal send wine, and many a may
As fair as she for whom the Trojan went,
And many a dear delight besides have lent,
Which, whoso is well loved of them shall keep
Till in forgetful death he falls asleep.

“ Therefore to-morrow shall those rites be done
That kindred blood demands that thou hast shed,
That if the mouth of thine own mother’s son
Did hap to curse thee ere he was quite dead,
The curse may lie the lighter on thy head,

Because the flower-crowned head of many a beast
Has fallen voiceless in our glorious feast."

Then did Adrastus rise and thank the King,
And the next day when yet low was the sun,
The sacrifice and every other thing
That unto these dread rites belonged, was done ,
And there Adrastus dwelt, hated of none,
And loved of many, and the King loved him,
For brave and wise he was and strong of limb

But chiefly amongst all did Atys love
The luckless stranger, whose fair tales of war
The Lydian's heart abundantly did move,
And much they talked of wandering afar
Some day, to lands where many marvels are,
With still the Phrygian through all things to be
The leader unto all felicity.

Now at this time folk came unto the King
Who on a forest's borders dwelling were,
Wherein there roamed full many a dangerous thing,
As wolf and wild bull, lion and brown bear ;
But chiefly in that forest was the lair
Of a great boar that no man could withstand,
And many a woe he wrought upon the land.

Since long ago that men in Calydon
Held chase, no beast like him had once been **seen**,

He ruined vineyards lying in the sun,
After his harvesting the men must glean
What he had left ; right glad they had not been
Among the tall stalks of the ripening wheat,
The fell destroyer's fatal tusks to meet.

For often would the lonely man entrapped
In vain from his dire fury strive to hide
In some thick hedge, and other whiles it happed
Some careless stranger by his place would ride,
And the tusks smote his fallen horse's side,
And what help then to such a wretch could come
With sword he could not draw, and far from home ?

Or else girls, sent their water-jars to fill,
Would come back pale, too terrified to cry,
Because they had but seen him from the hill ,
Or else again with side rent wretchedly,
Some hapless damsel midst the brake would lie.
Shortly to say, there neither man nor maid
Was safe afield whether they wrought or played.

Therefore were come these dwellers by the wood
To pray the King brave men to them to send,
That they might live ; and if he deemed it good,
That Atys with the other knights should wend,
They thought their grief the easier should have end ;
For both by gods and men they knew him loved,
And easily by hope of glory moved.

“ O Sire,” they said, “ thou know’st how Hercules
Was not content to wait till folk asked aid,
But sought the pests among their guarded trees ;
Thou know’st what name the Theban Cadmus made,
And how the bull of Marathon was laid
Dead on the fallows of the Athenian land,
And how folk worshipped Atalanta’s hand.

“ Fair would thy son’s name look upon the roll
Wherein such noble deeds as this are told ;
And great delight shall surely fill thy soul,
Thinking upon his deeds when thou art old,
And thy brave heart is waxen faint and cold :
Dost thou not know, O King, how men will strive
That they, when dead, still in their sons may live ?”

He shuddered as they spoke, because he thought,
Most certainly a winning tale is this
To draw him from the net where he is caught,
For hearts of men grow weary of all bliss ;
Nor is he one to be content with his,
If he should hear the trumpet-blast of fame
And far-off people calling on his name.

“ Good friends,” he said, “ go, get ye back again,
And doubt not I will send you men to slay
This pest ye fear : yet shall your prayer be vain
If ye with any other speak to-day ;
And for my son, with me he needs must stay,

For mighty cares oppress the Lydian land.
Fear not, for ye shall have a noble band."

And with that promise must they be content,
And so departed, having feasted well.
And yet some god or other ere they went,
If they were silent, this their tale must tell
To more than one man ; therefore it befell,
'That at the last Prince Atys knew the thing,
And came with angry eyes unto the King.

" Father," he said, " since when am I grown vile ?
Since when am I grown helpless of my hands ?
Or else what folk, with words enwrought with guile,
Thine ears have poisoned ; that when far-off lands
My fame might fill, by thy most strange commands
I needs must stay within this slothful home,
Whereto would God that I had never come ?

" What ! wilt thou take mine honour quite away ?
Wouldst thou, that, as with her I just have wed
I sit among thy folk at end of day,
She should be ever turning round her head
To watch some man for war appalled,
Because he wears a sword that he may use,
Which grace to me thou ever wilt refuse ?

" Or dost thou think, when thou hast run thy race
And thou art gone, and in thy stead I reign,

The people will do honour to my place,
Or that the lords leal men will still remain,
If yet my father's sword be sharp in vain ?
If on the wall his armour still hang up,
While for a spear I hold a drinking-cup ?”

“ O Son !” quoth Cræsus, “ well I know thee brave,
And worthy of high deeds of chivalry ;
Therefore the more thy dear life would I save,
Which now is threatened by the gods on high ;
Three times one night I dreamed I saw thee die,
Slain by some deadly iron-pointed thing,
While weeping lords stood round thee in a ring ”

Then loud laughed Atys, and he said again,
“ Father, and did this ugly dream tell thee
What day it was on which I should be slain ?
As may the gods grant I may one day be,
And not from sickness die right wretchedly,
Groaning with pain, my lords about my bed,
Wishing to God that I were fairly dead ;

“ But slain in battle, as the Lydian kings
Have died ere now, in some great victory,
While all about the Lydian shouting rings
Death to the beaten foemen as they fly.
What death but this, O father ! should I die ?
But if my life by iron shall be done,
What steel to-day shall glitter in the sun ?

“ Yea, father, if to thee it seemeth good
To keep me from the bright steel-bearing throng,
Let me be brave at least within the wood ;
For surely, if thy dream be true, no wrong
Can hap to me from this beast’s tushes strong .
Unless perchance the beast is grown so wise,
He haunts the forest clad in Lydian guise.”

Then Croesus said : “ O Son, I love thee so,
That thou shalt do thy will upon this tide :
But since unto this hunting thou must go,
A trusty friend along with thee shalt ride,
Who not for anything shall leave thy side
I think, indeed, he loves thee well enow
To thrust his heart ’twixt thee and any blow

“ Go then, O Son, and if by some short span
Thy life be measured, how shall it harm thee,
If while life last thou art a happy man ?
And thou art happy ; only unto me
Is trembling left, and infelicity :
The trembling of the man who loves on earth,
But unto thee is hope and present mirth

“ Nay, be thou not ashamed, for on this day
I fear not much : thou read’st my dream aright,
No teeth or claws shall take thy life away.
And it may chance, ere thy last glorious fight,
I shall be blinded by the endless night ;

And brave Adrastus on this day shall be
Thy safeguard, and shall give good heart to me.

“ Go then, and send him hither, and depart ;
And as the heroes did mayst thou too do,
Winning such fame as well may please thine heart ”
With that word from the King did Atys go,
Who, left behind, sighed, saying, “ May it be so,
Even as I hope ; and yet I would to God
These men upon my threshold ne’er had trod.”

So when Adrastus to the King was come
He said unto him, “ O my Phrygian friend,
We in this land have given you a fair home.
And ’gainst all foes your life will we defend :
Wherefore for us that life thou shouldest spend,
If any day there should be need therefore ;
And now a trusty friend I need right sore.

“ Doubtless ere now thou hast heard many say
There is a doom that threatens my son’s life ;
Therefore this place is stript of arms to-day,
And therefore still bides Atys with his wife,
And tempts not any god by raising strife ;
Yet none the less by no desire of his,
To whom would war be most abundant bliss.

“ And since to-day some glory he may gain
Against a monstrous bestial enemy

And that the meaning of my dream is plain ;
That saith that he by steel alone shall die,
His burning wish I may not well deny,
Therefore afield to-morrow doth he wend
And herein mayst thou show thyself my friend—

“For thou as captain of his band shalt ride,
And keep a watchful eye of everything,
Nor leave him whatsoever may betide :
Lo, thou art brave, the son of a great king,
And with thy praises doth this city ring,
Why should I tell thee what a name those gain,
Who dying for their friends, die not in vain?”

Then said Adrastus, “Now were I grown base
Beyond all words, if I should spare for aught
In guarding him, so sit with smiling face,
And of this matter take no further thought,
Because with my life shall his life be bought,
If ill should hap ; and no ill fate it were,
If I should die for what I hold so dear.”

Then went Adrastus, and next morn all things,
That 'longed unto the hunting were well dight,
'And forth they went clad as the sons of kings,
Fair was the morn, as through the sunshine bright
They rode, the Prince half wild with great delight,
The Phrygian smiling on him soberly,
And ever looking round with watchful eye.

So through the city all the rout rode fast,
With many a great black-muzzled yellow hound ;
And then the teeming country-side they passed,
Until they came to sour and rugged ground,
And there rode up a little heathy mound,
That overlooked the scrubby woods and low,
That of the beast's lair somewhat they might know.

And there a good man of the country-side
Showed them the places where he mostly lay ;
And they, descending, through the wood did ride,
And followed on his tracks for half the day.
And at the last they brought him well to bay,
Within an oozy space amidst the wood,
About the which a ring of alders stood.

So when the hounds' changed voices clear they heard,
With hearts aflame on towards him straight they drew
Atys the first of all, of nought afeard,
Except that folk should say some other slew
The beast ; and lustily his horn he blew,
Going afoot ; then, mighty spear in hand,
Adrastus headed all the following band.

Now when they came unto the plot of ground
Where stood the boar, hounds dead about him lay
Or sprawled about, bleeding from many a wound.
But still the others held him well at bay,
Nor had he been bestead thus ere that day.

But yet, seeing Atys, straight he rushed at him,
Speckled with foam, bleeding in flank and limb.

Then Atys stood and cast his well steeled spear
With a great shout, and straight and well it flew ;
For now the broad blade cutting through the ear,
A stream of blood from out the shoulder drew.
And therewithal another, no less true,
Adrastus cast, whereby the boar had died :
But Atys drew the bright sword from his side,

And to the tottering beast he drew anigh .
But as the sun's rays ran adown the blade
Adrastus threw a javelin hastily,
For of the mighty, beast was he afraid,
Lest by his wounds he should not yet be stayed,
But with a last rush cast his life away,
And dying there, the son of Croesus slay.

But even as the feathered dart he hurled,
His strained, despairing eyes, beheld the end,
And changed seemed all the fashion of the world,
And past and future into one did blend,
As he beheld the fixed eyes of his friend,
That no reproach had in them, and no fear,
For Death had seized him ere he thought him near.

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Adrastus shrieked, and running up he caught
The falling man, and from his bleeding side

Drew out the dart, and seeing that death had brought
Deliverance to him, he thereby had died ;
But ere his hand the luckless steel could guide,
And he the refuge of poor souls could win,
The horror-stricken huntsmen had rushed in.

And these, with blows and cries he heeded nought,
His unresisting hands made haste to bind ;
Then of the alder-boughs a bier they wrought,
And laid the corpse thercon, and 'gan to wind
Homeward amidst the tangled wood and blind,
And going slowly, at the eventide,
Some leagues from Sardis did that day abide.

Onward next morn the slaughtered man they bore,
With him that slew him, and at end of day .
They reached the city, and with mourning sore
Toward the King's palace did they take their way.
He in an open western chamber lay
Feasting, though inwardly his heart did burn
Until that Atys should to him return.

And when those wails first smote upon his ear
He set the wine-cup down, and to his feet
He rose, and bitter all-consuming fear
Swallowed his joy, and nigh he went to meet
That which was coming through the weeping street :
But in the end he thought it good to wait,
And stood there doubting all the ills of fate.

But when at last up to that royal place
Folk brought the thing he once had held so dear,
Still stood the King, staring with ghastly face
As they brought forth Adrastus and the bier,
But spoke at last, slowly without a tear,
“ O Phrygian man, that I did purify,
Is it through thee that Atys came to die ?”

“ O King,” Adrastus said, “ take now my life,
With whatso torment seemeth good to thee,
As my word went, for I would end this strife,
And underneath the earth lie quietly ;
Nor is it my will here alive to be :
For as my brother, so Prince Atys died,
And this unlucky hand some god did guide.”

Then as a man constrained, the tale he told
From end to end, nor spared himself one whit :
And as he spoke, the wood did still behold,
The trodden grass, and Atys dead on it ;
And many a change o’er the King’s face did flit
Of kingly rage, and hatred and despair,
As on the slayer’s face he still did stare.

At last he said, “ Thy death avails me nought,
The gods themselves have done this bitter deed,
That I was all too happy was their thought,
Therefore thy heart is dead and mine doth bleed,
And I am helpless as a trodden weed :



Thou art but as the handle of the spear,
The caster sits far off from any fear.

“Yet, if thy hurt they meant, I can do this,—
—Loose him and let him go in peace from me—
I will not slay the slayer of all my bliss ;
Yet go, poor man, for when thy face I see
I curse the gods for their felicity.
Surely some other slayer they would have found,
If thou hadst long ago been under ground

“Alas, Adrastus ! in my inmost heart
I knew the gods would one day do this thing,
But deemed indeed that it would be thy part
To comfort me amidst my sorrowing ;
Make haste to go, for I am still a King !
Madness may take me, I have many hands
Who will not spare to do my worst commands.”

With that Adrastus' bonds were done away,
And forthwith to the city gates he ran,
And on the road where they had been that day
Rushed through the gathering night ; and some lone man
Beheld next day his visage wild and wan,
Peering from out a thicket of the wood
Where he had spilt that well-beloved blood.

And now the day of burial pomp must be.
And to those rites all lords of Lydia came

About the King, and that day, they and he
Cast royal gifts of rich things on the flame ;
But while they stood and wept, and called by name
Upon the dead, amidst them came a man
With raiment rent, and haggard face and wan :

Who when the marshals would have thrust him out
And men looked strange on him, began to say,
" Surely the world is changed since ye have doubt
Of who I am ; nay, turn me not away,
For ye have called me princely ere to-day—
Adrastus, son of Gordius, a great King,
Where unto Pallas Phrygian maidens sing.

" O Lydians, many a rich thing have ye cast
Into this flame, but I myself will give
A greater gift, since now I see at last
The gods are wearied for that still I live,
And with their will, why should I longer strive?
Atys, O Atys, thus I give to thee
A life that lived for thy felicity."

And therewith from his side a knife he drew,
And, crying out, upon the pile he leapt,
And with one mighty stroke himself he slew.
So there these princes both together slept.
And their light ashes, gathered up, were kept
Within a golden vessel wrought all o'er
With histories of this hunting of the boar.

A GENTLE wind had risen midst his tale,
That bore the sweet scents of the fertile vale
In at the open windows ; and these men
The burden of their years scarce noted then,
Soothed by the sweet luxurious summer time,
And by the cadence of that ancient rhyme,
Spite of its saddening import ; nay, indeed,
Of some such thoughts the Wanderers had need
As that tale gave them—Yea, a man shall be
A wonder for his glorious chivalry,
First in all wisdom, of a prudent mind.
Yet none the less him too his fate shall find
Unfenced by these, a man 'mongst other men.
 ea, and will Fortune pick out, now and then,
The noblest for the anvil of her blows ;
Great names are few, and yet, indeed, who knows
What greater souls have fallen 'neath the stroke
Of careless fate ? Purblind are most of folk,
The happy are the masters of the earth
Which ever give small heed to hapless worth ;
So goes the world, and this we needs must bear
Like eld and death : yet there were some men there
Who drank in silence to the memory
Of those who failed on earth great men to be,
, Though better than the men who won the crown.

But when the sun was fairly going down
They left the house, and, following up the stream,
In the low sun saw the kingfisher gleam
'Twixt bank and alder, and the grebe steal out
From the high sedge, and, in his restless doubt,
Dive down, and rise to see what men were there ;
They saw the swallow chase high up in air
The circling gnats ; the shaded dusky pool
Broke by the splashing chub ; the ripple cool,
Rising and falling, of some distant weir
They heard, till it oppressed the listening ear,
As twilight grew : so back they turned again
Glad of their rest, and pleasure after pain.

WITHIN the gardens once again they met,
That now the roses did well-nigh forget,
For hot July was drawing to an end,
And August came the fainting year to mend
With fruit and grain ; so 'neath the trellises,
Nigh blossomless, did they lie well at ease,
And watched the poppies burn across the grass,
And o'er the bindweed's bells the brown bee pass
Still murmuring of his gains : windless and bright
The morn had been, to help their dear delight ;
But heavy clouds ere noon grew round the sun,
And, halfway to the zenith, wild and dun
The sky grew, and the thunder growled afar ;
But, ere the steely clouds began their war,
A change there came, and, as by some great hand,
The clouds that hung in threatening o'er the land
Were drawn away ; then a light wind arose
That shook the light stems of that flowery close,
And made men sigh for pleasure ; therewithal
Did mirth upon the feasting elders fall,
And they no longer watched the lowering sky,
But called aloud for some new history.

Then spoke the Suabian, "Sirs, this tale is told
Among our searchers for fine stones and gold,
And though I tell it wrong be good to me ;
For I the written book did never see,
Made by some Fleming, as I think, wherein
Is told this tale of wilfulness and sin."

THE
WATCHING OF THE FALCON.

ARGUMENT.

THE case of this Falcon was such, that whoso watched it without sleeping for seven days and seven nights, had his first wish granted him by a fay lady, that appeared to him thereon; and some wished one thing, and some another. But a certain King, who watched the Falcon daily, would wish for nought but the love of that fay; which wish being accomplished, was afterwards his ruin.

A CROSS the sea a land there is,
Where, if fate will, may men have bliss,
For it is fair as any land :
There hath the reaper a full hand,
While in the orchard hangs aloft
The purple fig, a-growing soft ;
And fair the trellised vine-bunches
Are swung across the high elm-trees ;
And in the rivers great fish play,
While over them pass day by day
The laden barges to their place.
There maids are straight, and fair of face,

And men are stout for husbandry,
And all is well as it can be
Upon this earth where all has end.

For on them God is pleased to send
The gift of Death down from above,
That envy, hatred, and hot love,
Knowledge with hunger by his side,
And avarice and deadly pride,
There may have end like everything
Both to the shepherd and the king :
Lest this green earth become but hell
If folk thereon should ever dwell.

Full little most men think of this,
But half in woe and half in bliss
They pass their lives, and die at last
Unwilling, though their lot be cast
In wretched places of the earth,
Where men have little joy from birth
Until they die ; in no such case
Were those who tilled this pleasant place.

There soothly men were loth to die,
Though sometimes in his misery
A man would say " Would I were dead !"
Alas ! full little likelihead
That he should live for ever there.

So folk within that country fair
Lived on, nor from their memories drave
The thought of what they could not have,
And without need tormented still

Each other with some bitter ill ;
Yea, and themselves too, growing grey
With dread of some long-lingering day,
That never came ere they were dead
With green sods growing on the head ;
Nowise content with what they had,
But falling still from good to bad
While hard they sought the hopeless best ;
And seldom happy or at rest
Until at last with lessening blood
One foot within the grave they stood.

Now so it chanced that in this land
There did a certain castle stand,
Set all alone deep in the hills,
Amid the sound of falling rills
Within a valley of sweet grass,
To which there went one narrow pass
Through the dark hills, but seldom trod.
Rarely did horse-hoof press the sod
About the quiet weedy moat,
Where unscares did the great fish float ;
Because men dreaded there to see
The uncouth things of faërie ;
Nathless by some few fathers old
These tales about the place were told
That neither squire nor seneschal
Or varlet came in bower or hall,
Yet all things were in order due,

Hangings of gold and red and blue,
And tables with fair service set ;
Cups that had paid the Cæsar's debt
Could he have laid his hands on them ;
Dorsars, with pearls in every hem,
And fair embroidered gold-wrought things,
Fit for a company of kings ;
And in the chambers dainty beds,
With pillows dight for fair young heads ;
And horses in the stables were,
And in the cellars wine full clear
And strong, and casks of ale and mead ;
Yea, all things a great lord could need.

For whom these things were ready there
None knew ; but if one chanced to fare
Into that place at Easter-tide,
There would he find a falcon tied
Unto a pillar of the Hall ;
And such a fate to him would fall,
That if unto the seventh night,
He watched the bird from dark to light,
And light to dark unceasingly,
On the last evening he should see
A lady beautiful past words ;
Then, were he come of clowns or lords,
Son of a swineherd or a king,
There must she grant him anything
Perforce, that he might dare to ask,
And do his very hardest task.

But if he slumbered, ne'er again
The wretch would wake for he was slain
Helpless, by hands he could not see,
And his corpse mangled wretchedly.

Now said these elders—Ere this tide
Full many folk this thing have tried,
But few have got much good thereby ;
For first, a many came to die
By slumbering ere their watch was done ;
Or else they saw that lovely one,
And mazed, they knew not what to say ;
Or asked for some small thing that day
That easily they might have won,
Nor staked their lives and souls thereon ;
Or asking, asked for some great thing
That was their bane ; as to be king
One asked, and died the morrow morn
That he was crowned, of all forlorn.

Yet thither came a certain man,
Who from being poor great riches wan
Past telling, whose grandsons now are
Great lords thereby in peace and war.
And in their coat-of-arms they bear,
Upon a field of azure fair,
A castle and a falcon, set
Below a chief of golden fret.

And in our day a certain knight
Prayed to be worsted in no fight,

And so it happed to him : yet he
Died none the less most wretchedly,
And all his prowess was in vain,
For by a losel was he slain,
As on the highway side he slept
One summer night, of no man kept.

Such tales as these the fathers old
About that lonely castle told ;
And in their day the king must try
Himself to prove that mystery,
Although, unless the fay could give
For ever on the earth to live,
Nought could he ask that he had not :
For boundless riches had he got,
Fair children, and a faithful wife ;
And happily had passed his life,
And all fulfilled of victory,
Yet was he fain this thing to see.

So towards the mountains he set out
One noontide, with a gallant rout
Of knights and lords, and as the day
Began to fail came to the way
Where he must enter all alone,
Between the dreary walls of stone.
Thereon to that fair company
He bade farewell, who wistfully
Looked backward oft as home they rode.
But in the entry he abode

Of that rough unknown narrowing pass, .
Where twilight at the high noon was.

Then onward he began to ride :
Smooth rose the rocks on every side,
And seemed as they were cut by man ;
Adown them ever water ran,
But they of living things were bare,
Yea, not a blade of grass grew there ;
And underfoot rough was the way,
For scattered all about there lay
Great jagged pieces of black stone.
Throughout the pass the wind did moan,
With such wild noises, that the King
Could almost think he heard something
Spoken of men ; as one might hear
The voices of folk standing near
One's chamber wall : yet saw he nought
Except those high walls strangely wrought,
And overhead the strip of sky.

So, going onward painfully,
He met therein no evil thing,
But came about the sunsetting
Unto the opening of the pass,
And thence beheld a vale of grass
Bright with the yellow daffodil ;
And all the vale the sun did fill
With his last glory. Midmost there
Rose up a stronghold, built four-square,
Upon a flowery grassy mound,

That moat and high wall ran around.

Thereby he saw a walled pleasance,
With walks and sward fit for the dance
Of Arthur's court in its best time,
That seemed to feel some magic clime ;
For though through all the vale outside
Things were as in the April-tide,
And daffodils and cowslips grew
And hidden the March violets blew,
Within the bounds of that sweet close
Was trellised the bewildering rose ;
There was the lily over-sweet,
And starry pinks for garlands meet ;
And apricots hung on the wall
And midst the flowers did peaches fall,
And nought had blemish there or spot,
For in that place decay was not.

Silent awhile the King abode
Beholding all, then on he rode
And to the castle-gate drew nigh,
Till fell the drawbridge silently,
And when across it he did ride
He found the great gates open wide,
And entered there, but as he passed
The gates were shut behind him fast,
But not before that he could see
The drawbridge rise up silently.

Then round he gazed oppressed with awe,

And there no living thing he saw ✱
Except the sparrows in the eaves,
As restless as light autumn leaves
Blown by the fitful rainy wind.
Thereon his final goal to find,
He lighted off his war-horse good
And let him wander as he would,
When he had eased him of his gear ;
Then gathering heart against his fear.
Just at the silent end of day
Through the fair porch he took his way
And found at last a goodly hall
With glorious hangings on the wall,
Inwrought with trees of every clime,
And stories of the ancient time,
But all of sorcery they were.
For o'er the daïs Venus fair,
Fluttered about by many a dove,
Made hopeless men for hopeless love,
Both sick and sorry ; there they stood
Wrought wonderfully in various mood,
But wasted all by that hid fire
Of measureless o'er-sweet desire,
And let the hurrying world go by
Forgetting all felicity.
But down the hall the tale was wrought
How Argo in old time was brought
To Colchis for the fleece of gold.
And on the other side was told

How mariners for long years came
 To Circe, winning grief and shame.
 Until at last by hardihead
 And craft, Ulysses won her bed.

Long upon these the King did look
 And of them all good heed he took ;
 To see if they would tell him aught
 About the matter that he sought,
 But all were of the times long past ;
 So going all about, at last
 When grown nigh weary of his search
 A falcon on a silver perch,
 Anigh the dais did he see,
 And wondered, because certainly
 At his first coming 'twas not there ;
 But 'neath the bird a scroll most fair,
 With golden letters on the white
 He saw, and in the dim twilight
 By diligence could he read this :—

*“ Ye who have not enow of bliss,
 And in this hard world labour sore,
 By manhood here may get you more.
 And be fulfilled of everything,
 Till ye be masters of the King.*

*And yet, since I who promise this
 Am nowise God to give man bliss
 Past ending, now in time beware,
 And if you live in little care*

*At this time get you back again,
Lest unknown woe you chance to gain
In wishing for a thing untried."*

A little while did he abide,
When he had read this, deep in thought,
Wondering indeed if there were aught
He had not got, that a wise man
Would wish ; yet in his mind it ran
That he might win a boundless realm,
Yea, come to wear upon his helm
The crown of the whole conquered earth ;
That all who lived thereon, from birth
To death should call him King and Lord,
And great kings tremble at his word,
Until in turn he came to die.
Therewith a little did he sigh,
But thought, " Of Alexander yet
Men talk, nor would they e'er forget
My name, if this should come to be,
Whoever should come after me :
But while I lay wrapped round with gold
Should tales and histories manifold
Be written of me, false and true ;
And as the time still onward drew
Almost a god would folk count me,
Saying, ' In our time none such be.' "
But therewith did he sigh again,
And said, " Ah, vain, and worse than vain !

For though the world forget me nought,
Yet by that time should I be brought
Where all the world I should forget,
And bitterly should I regret
That I, from godlike great renown,
To helpless death must fall adown :
How could I bear to leave it all ?”

Then straight upon his mind did fall
Thoughts of old longings half forgot,
Matters for which his heart was hot
A while ago : whereof no more
He cared for some, and some right sore
Had vexed him, being fulfilled at last.
And when the thought of these had passed
Still something was there left behind,
That by no torturing of his mind
Could he in any language name,
Or into form of wishing frame.

At last he thought, “ What matters it,
Before these seven days shall flit
Some great thing surely shall I find,
That gained will not leave grief behind,
Nor turn to deadly injury.
So now will I let these things be
And think of some unknown delight.”

Now, therewithal, was come the night
And thus his watch was well begun ;

And till the rising of the sun,
Waking, he paced about the hall,
And saw the hangings on the wall
Fade into nought, and then grow white
In patches by the pale moonlight,
And then again fade utterly
As still the moonbeams passed them by,
Then in a while, with hope of day,
Begin a little to grow grey,
Until familiar things they grew,
As up at last the great sun drew,
And lit them with his yellow light
At ending of another night.

Then right glad was he of the day,
That passed with him in such-like way;
For neither man nor beast came near,
Nor any voices did he hear.
And when again it drew to night
Silent it passed, till first twilight
Of morning came, and then he heard
The feeble twittering of some bird,
That, in that utter silence drear,
Smote harsh and startling on his ear.

Therewith came on that lonely day
That passed him in no other way;
And thus six days and nights went by
And nothing strange had come anigh.

And on that day he well-nigh deemed
That all that story had been dreamed.

Daylight and dark, and night and day,
Passed ever in their wonted way ;
The wind played in the trees outside,
The rooks from out the high trees cried ;

And all seemed natural and fair,
With little signs of magic there.
Yet neither could he quite forget
That close with summer blossoms set,
And fruit hung on trees blossoming,
When all about was early spring.

Yea, if all this by man were made,
Strange was it that still undecayed
The food lay on the tables still
Unchanged by man, that wine did fill
The golden cups, still bright and red.
And all was so apparelled

For guests that came not, yet was all
As though that servants filled the hall.

So waxed and waned his hopes, and still
He formed no wish for good or ill.

And while he thought of this and that
Upon his perch the falcon sat
Unfed, unhooded, his bright eyes
Beholders of the hard-earned prize,
Glancing around him restlessly,
As though he knew the time drew nigh
When this long watching should be done.

So little by little fell the sun,

From high noon unto sun-setting ;
And in that lapse of time the King,
Though still he woke, yet none the less
Was dreaming in his sleeplessness
Of this and that which he had done
Before this watch he had begun ;
Till, with a start, he looked at last
About him, and all dreams were past ;
For now, though it was past twilight
Without, within all grew as bright
As when the noon-sun smote the wall,
Though no lamp shone within the hall.

Then rose the King upon his feet,
And well-nigh heard his own heart beat,
And grew all pale for hope and fear,
As sound of footsteps caught his ear
But soft, and as some fair lady,
Going as gently as might be,
Stopped now and then awhile, distraught
By pleasant wanderings of sweet thought.

Nigher the sound came, and more nigh,
Until the King unwittingly
Trembled, and felt his hair arise,
But on the door still kept his eyes.
That opened soon, and in the light
There stepped alone a lady bright,
And made straight toward him up the hall.

In golden garments was she clad
And round her waist a belt she had

Of emeralds fair, and from her feet,
That shod with gold the floor did meet,
She held the raiment daintily,
And on her golden head had she
A rose-wreath round a pearl-wrought crown,
Softly she walked with eyes cast down,
Nor looked she any other than
An earthly lady, though no man
Has seen so fair a thing as she.

So when her face the King could see
Still more he trembled, and he thought,
"Surely my wish is hither brought,
And this will be a goodly day
If for mine own I win this may."
And therewithal she drew anear
Until the trembling King could hear
Her very breathing, and she raised
Her head and on the King's face gazed
With serious eyes, and stopping there,
Swept from her shoulders her long hair,
And let her gown fall on her feet,
Then spoke in a clear voice and sweet :

" Well hast thou watched, so now, O King,
Be bold, and wish for some good thing ;
And yet, I counsel thee, be wise.
Behold, spite of these lips and eyes,
Hundreds of years old now am I
And have seen joy and misery.
And thou, who yet hast lived in bliss,

I bid thee well consider this ;
Better it were that men should live
As beasts, and take what earth can give,
The air, the warm sun and the grass
Until unto the earth they pass,
And gain perchance nought worse than rest,
Than that not knowing what is best
For sons of men, they needs must thirst
For what shall make their lives accurst.

“Therefore I bid thee now beware,
Lest getting something seeming fair,
Thou com'st in vain to long for more
Or lest the thing thou wishest for
Make thee unhappy till thou diest,
Or lest with speedy death thou buyest
A little hour of happiness
Or lazy joy with sharp distress.

“Alas, why say I this to thee,
For now I see full certainly,
That thou wilt ask for such a thing,
It had been best for thee to fling
Thy body from a mountain-top,
Or in a white hot fire to drop,
Or ever thou hadst seen me here,
Nay then be speedy and speak clear.”

Then the King cried out eagerly,
Grown fearless, “Ah, be kind to me !
Thou knowest what I long for then !
Thou know'st that I, a king of men,

Will ask for nothing else than thee !
Thou didst not say this could not be,
And I have had enow of bliss,
If I may end my life with this."

"Hearken," she said, "what men will say
When they are mad ; before to-day
I knew that words such things could mean,
And wondered that it could have been.

"Think well, because this wished-for joy,
That surely will thy bliss destroy,
Will let thee live, until thy life
Is wrapped in such bewildering strife
That all thy days will seem but ill—
Now wilt thou wish for this thing still?"

"Wilt thou then grant it?" cried the King ;
"Surely thou art an earthly thing,
And all this is but mockery,
And thou canst tell no more than I
What ending to my life shall be."

"Nay, then," she said, "I grant it thee
Perforce ; come nigh, for I am thine
Until the morning sun doth shine,
And only coming time can prove
What thing I am."

Dizzy with love,
And with surprise struck motionless
That this divine thing, with far less
Of striving than a village maid,
Had yielded, there he stood afraid,

Spite of hot words and passionate,
And strove to think upon his fate.

But as he stood there, presently
With smiling face she drew anigh,
And on his face he felt her breath.
"O love," she said, "dost thou fear death?
Not till next morning shalt thou die,
Or fall into thy misery."
Then on his hand her hand did fall,
And forth she led him down the hall,
Going full softly by his side.

"O love," she said, "now well betide
The day whereon thou cam'st to me.
I would this night a year might be,
Yea, life-long ; such life as we have,
A thousand years from womb to grave."

And then that clinging hand seemed worth
Whatever joy was left on earth,
And every trouble he forgot,
And time and death remembered not :
Kinder she grew, she clung to him
With loving arms, her eyes did swim
With love and pity, as he strove
To show the wisdom of his love ;
With trembling lips she praised his choice,
And said, "Ah, well may'st thou rejoice,

Well may'st thou think this one short night
Worth years of other men's delight,
If thy own heart as my heart is,
Sunk in a boundless sea of bliss ;
O love, rejoice with me ! rejoice !”

But as she spoke, her honied voice
Trembled, and midst of sobs she said,
“ O love, and art thou still afraid ?
Return, then, to thine happiness,
Nor will I love thee any less ;
But watch thee as a mother might
Her child at play.”

With strange delight
He stammered out, “ Nay, keep thy tears
For me, and for my ruined years
Weep love, that I may love thee more, .
My little hour will soon be o'er.”

“ Ah, love,” she said, “ and thou art wise
As men are, with long miseries
Buying these idle words and vain,
My foolish love, with lasting pain ;
And yet, thou wouldst have died at last
If in all wisdom thou hadst passed
Thy weary life : forgive me then,
In pitying the sad life of men.”

Then in such bliss his soul did swim,
But tender music unto him
Her words were ; death and misery
But empty names were grown to be,

As from that place his steps she drew,
And dark the hall behind them grew.

BUT end comes to all earthly bliss,
And by his choice full short was his ;
And in the morning, grey and cold,
Beside the dais did she hold
His trembling hand, and wistfully
He, doubting what his fate should be,
Gazed at her solemn eyes, that now,
Beneath her calm, untroubled brow,
Were fixed on his wild face and wan ;
At last she said, " Oh, hapless man,
Depart ! your full wish you have had ;
A little time you have been glad,
You shall be sorry till you die.

" And though, indeed, full fain am I
This might not be ; nathless, as day
Night follows, colourless and grey,
So this shall follow your delight,
Your joy hath ending with last night—
Nay, peace, and hearken to your fate.

" Strife without peace, early and late,
Lasting long after you are dead,
And laid with earth upon your head ;
War without victory shall you have

Defeat, nor honour shall you save ;
Your fair land shall be rent and torn,
Your people be of all forlorn,
And all men curse you for this thing."

She loosed his hand, but yet the King
Said, " Yea, and I may go with thee ?
Why should we part ? then let things be
E'en as they will ! " " Poor man," she said,
" Thou ravest ; our hot love is dead,
If ever it had any life :
Go, make thee ready for the strife
Wherein thy life shall soon be wrapped ;
And of the things that here have happed
Make thou such joy as thou may'st do ;
But I from this place needs must go,
Nor shalt thou ever see me more
Until thy troubled life is o'er :
Alas ! to say ' farewell ' to thee
Were nought but bitter mockery.
Fare as thou may'st, and with good heart
Play to the end thy wretched part."

Therewith she turned and went from him,
And with such pain his eyes did swim
He scarce could see her leave the place ;
And then, with troubled and pale face,
He gat him thence : and soon he found
His good horse in the base-court bound ;
So, loosing him, forth did he ride,

For the great gates were open wide,
And flat the heavy draw-bridge lay.

So by the middle of the day,
That murky pass had he gone through,
And come to country that he knew ;
And homeward turned his horse's head,
And passing village and homestead
Nigh to his palace came at last ;
And still the further that he passed
From that strange castle of the fays,
More dreamlike seemed those seven days,
And dreamlike the delicious night ;
And like a dream the shoulders white,
And clinging arms and yellow hair,
And dreamlike the sad morning there.
Until at last he 'gan to deem
That all might well have been a dream—
Yet why was life a weariness ?
What meant this sting of sharp distress ?
This longing for a hopeless love,
No sighing from his heart could move ?

Or else, ' she did not come and go
As fays might do, but soft and slow
Her lovely feet fell on the floor ;
She set her fair hand to the door
As any dainty maid might do ;
And though, indeed, there are but few

Beneath the sun as fair as she,
She seemed a fleshly thing to be.
Perchance a merry mock this is,
And I may some day have the bliss
To see her lovely face again,
As smiling she makes all things plain.
And then as I am still a king,
With me may she make tarrying
Full long, yea, till I come to die.'

Therewith at last being come anigh
Unto his very palace gate,
He saw his knights and squires wait
His coming, therefore on the ground
He lighted, and they flocked around
Till he should tell them of his fare.
Then mocking said he, "Ye may dare,
The worst man of you all, to go
And watch as I was bold to do ;
For nought I heard except the wind,
And nought I saw to call to mind."
So said he, but they noted well
That something more he had to tell
If it had pleased him ; one old man,
Beholding his changed face and wan,
Muttered, "Would God it might be so !
Alas ! I fear what fate may do ;
Too much good fortune hast thou had
By anything to be more glad
Than thou hast been, I fear thee then

Lest thou becom'st a curse to men."
But to his place the doomed King passed,
And all remembrance strove to cast
From out his mind of that past day,
And spent his life in sport and play.

GREAT among other kings, I said
He was before he first was led
Unto that castle of the fays
But soon he lost his happy days
And all his goodly life was done.

And first indeed his best-loved son,
The very apple of his eye,
Waged war against him bitterly ;
And when this son was overcome
And taken, and folk led him home,
And him the King had gone to meet,
Meaning with gentle words and sweet
To win him to his love again,
By his own hand he found him slain.

I know not if the doomed King yet
Remembered the fay lady's threat,
But troubles upon troubles came :
His daughter next was brought to shame,
Who unto all eyes seemed to be
The image of all purity,

And fleeing from the royal place
The King no more beheld her face.
Then next a folk that came from far
Sent to the King great threats of war,
But he, full-fed of victory,
Deemed this a little thing to be,
And thought the troubles of his home
Thereby he well might overcome
Amid the hurry of the fight.

His foemen seemed of little might,
Although they thronged like summer bees
About the outlying villages,
And on the land great ruin brought.
Well, he this barbarous people sought
With such an army as seemed meet
To put the world beneath his feet ;
The day of battle came, and he,
Flushed with the hope of victory,
Grew happy, as he had not been
Since he those glorious eyes had seen.

They met,—his solid ranks of steel
There scarcely more the darts could feel
Of those new foemen, than if they
Had been a hundred miles away :—
They met,—a storied folk were his
To whom sharp war had long been bliss,
A thousand years of memories
Were flashing in their shielded eyes ;
And grave philosophers they had

To bid them ever to be glad
To meet their death and get life done
Midst glorious deeds from sire to son.

And those they met were beasts, or worse,
To whom life seemed a jest, a curse ;
Of fame and name they had not heard ;
Honour to them was but a word,
A word spoke in another tongue ;
No memories round their banners clung,
No walls they knew, no art of war,
By hunger were they driven afar
Unto the place whereon they stood,
Hungry for bestial joys and blood.

No wonder if these barbarous men
Were slain by hundreds to each ten
Of the King's brave well-armoured folk,
No wonder if their charges broke
To nothing, on the walls of steel,
And back the baffled hordes must reel
So stood throughout a summer day
Scarce touched the King's most fair array.
Yet as it drew to even-tide
The foe still surged on every side,
As hopeless hunger-bitten men,
About his folk grown wearied then.

Therewith the King beheld that crowd
Howling and dusk, and cried aloud,
"What do ye, soldiers? and how long

Shall weak folk hold in check the strong?
Nay, forward banners ! end the day
And show these folk how brave men play."
The young knights shouted at his word,
But the old folk in terror heard
The shouting run adown the line,
And saw men flush as if with wine—
"O Sire," they said, "the day is sure,
Nor will these folk the night endure
Beset with misery and fears."
Alas ! they spoke to heedless ears ;
For scarce one look on them he cast
But forward through the ranks he passed,
And cried out, "Who will follow me
To win a fruitful victory?"
And toward the foe in haste he spurred,
And at his back their shouts he heard,
Such shouts as he ne'er heard again.

They met—ere moonrise all the plain
Was filled by men in hurrying flight
The relics of that shameful fight ;
The close array, the full-armed men,
The ancient fame availed not then,
The dark night only was a friend
To bring that slaughter to an end ;
And surely there the King had died,
But driven by that back-rushing tide
Against his will he needs must flee ;

And as he pondered bitterly
On all that wreck that he had wrought,
From time to time indeed he thought
Of the fay woman's dreadful threat.

“ But everything was not lost yet ;
Next day he said, great was the rout
And shameful beyond any doubt,
But since indeed at eventide
The rout began, not many died,
And gathering all the stragglers now
His troops still made a gallant show—
Alas ! it was a show indeed ;
Himself desponding, did he lead
His beaten men against the foe,
Thinking at least to lie alow
Before the final rout should be
But scarce upon the enemy
Could these, whose shaken banners shook
The frightened world, now dare to look ;
Nor yet could the doomed King die there
A death he once had held most fair ;
Amid unwounded men he came
Back to his city, bent with shame,
Unkingly, midst his great distress,
Yea, weeping at the bitterness
Of women's curses that did greet
His passage down the troubled street.
But sight of all the things they loved,

The memory of their manhood moved
Within the troops, and aged men
And boys must think of battle then.
And men that had not seen the foe
Must clamour to the war to go.
So a great army poured once more
From out the city, and before
The very gates they fought again,
But their late valour was in vain ;
They died indeed, and that was good,
But nought they gained for all the blood
Poured out like water ; for the foe,
Men might have stayed a while ago,
A match for very gods were grown,
So like the field in June-tide mown
The King's men fell, and but in vain
The remnant strove the town to gain ;
Whose battlements were nought to stav
An untaught foe upon that day,
Though many a tale the annals told
Of sieges in the days of old,
When all the world then knew of war
From that fair place was driven afar.

As for the King, a charmed life
He seemed to bear ; from out that strife
He came unhurt, and he could see,
As down the valley he did flee
With his most wretched company,

His palace flaming to the sky.
Then in the very midst of woe
His yearning thoughts would backward go
Unto the castle of the fay ;
He muttered, " Shall I curse that day,
The last delight that I have had,
For certainly I then was glad ?
And who knows if what men call bliss
Had been much better now than this
When I am hastening to the end."

That fearful rest, that dreaded friend,
That Death, he did not gain as yet ;
A band of men he soon did get,
A ruined rout of bad and good,
With whom within the tangled wood,
The rugged mountain, he abode,
And thenceforth oftentimes they rode
Into the fair land once called his,
And yet but little came of this,
Except more woe for Heaven to see
Some little added misery
Unto that miserable realm :
The barbarous foe did overwhelm
The cities and the fertile plain,
And many a peaceful man was slain,
And many a maiden brought to shame,
And yielded towns were set aflame ;
For all the land was masterless.

Long dwelt the King in great distress,

From wood to mountain ever tost,
Mourning for all that he had lost,
Until it chanced upon a day,
Asleep in early morn he lay,
And in a vision there did see
Clad all in black, that fay lady
Whereby all this had come to pass,
But dim as in a misty glass :
She said, " I come thy death to tell
Yet now to thee may say 'farewell,'
For in a short space wilt thou be
Within an endless dim country
Where thou may'st well win woe or bliss."
Therewith she stooped his lips to kiss
And vanished straightway from his sight,
So waking there he sat upright
And looked around, but nought could see
And heard but song-birds' melody,
For it was the first hour of day.

Then with a sigh adown he lay
And slept, nor ever woke again,
For that same hour was he slain
By stealthy traitors as he slept.

He of a few was much bewept,
But of most men was well forgot
While that town's ashes still were hot
The foeman on that day did burn.

As for the land, great Time did turn
The bloody fields to deep green grass,
And from the minds of men did pass
The memory of that time of woe,
And at this day all things are so
As first I said ; a land it is
Where men may dwell in rest and bliss
If so they will—Who yet will not,
Because their hasty hearts are hot
With foolish hate, and longing vain
The sire and dam of grief and pain.

NEATH the bright sky cool grew the weary earth,
And many a bud in that fair hour had birth
Upon the garden bushes ; in the west
The sky got ready for the great sun's rest,
And all was fresh and lovely ; none the less
Although those old men shared the happiness
Of the bright eve, 'twas mixed with memories
Of how they might in old times have been wise,
Not casting by for very wilfulness
What wealth might come their changing life to bless ;
Lulling their hearts to sleep, amid the cold
Of bitter times, that so they might behold
Some joy at last, e'en if it lingered long.
That, wearing not their souls with grief and wrong,
They still might watch the changing world go by,
Content to live, content at last to die.

Alas ! if they had reached content at last,
It was perforce when all their strength was past ;
And after loss of many days once bright,
With foolish hopes of unattained delight.

AUGUST.

A CROSS the gap made by our English hinds,
Amidst the Roman's handiwork, behold
Far off the long-roofed church ; the shepherd binds
The withy round the hurdles of his fold ;
Down in the foss the river fed of old,
That through long lapse of time has grown to be
The little grassy valley that you see.

Rest here awhile, not yet the eve is still,
The bees are wandering yet, and you may hear
The barley mowers on the trenched hill,
The sheep-bells, and the restless changing weir,
All little sounds made musical and clear
Beneath the sky that burning August gives,
While yet the thought of glorious Summer lives.

Ah, love ! such happy days, such days as these,
Must we still waste them, craving for the best,
Like lovers o'er the painted images
Of those who once their yearning hearts have blessed ?
Have we been happy on our day of rest ?
Thine eyes say "yes,"—but if it came again,
Perchance its ending would not seem so vain.

NOW came fulfillment of the year's desire,
The tall wheat, coloured by the August fire
Grew heavy-headed, dreading its decay,
And blacker grew the elm-trees day by day.
About the edges of the yellow corn,
And o'er the gardens grown somewhat outworn
The bees went hurrying to fill up their store ;
The apple-boughs bent over more and more ;
With peach and apricot the garden wall,
Was odorous, and the pears began to fall
From off the high tree with each freshening-breeze.

So in a house bordered about with trees,
A little raised above the waving gold
The Wanderers heard this marvellous story told,
While 'twixt the gleaming flasks of ancient wine,
They watched the reapers' slow advancing line.

PYGMALION AND THE IMAGE.

ARGUMENT.

A MAN of Cyprus, a Sculptor named Pygmalion, made an Image of a Woman, fairer than any that had yet been seen, and in the end came to love his own handiwork as though it had been alive : wherefore, praying to Venus for help, he obtained his end, for she made the Image alive indeed, and a Woman, and Pygmalion wedded her.

AT Amathus, that from the southern side
Of Cyprus, looks across the Syrian sea,
There did in ancient time a man abide
Known to the island-dwellers, for that he
Had wrought most godlike works in imagery,
And day by day still greater honour won,
Which man our old books call Pygmalion.

Yet in the praise of men small joy he had,
But walked abroad with downcast brooding face.
Nor yet by any damsel was made glad ;
For, sooth to say, the women of that place
Must seem to all men an accursed race,
Who with the turner of all hearts once strove
So in their hearts must carry lust for love.

Now on a day it chanced that he had been
About the streets, and on the crowded quays,
Rich with unopened wealth of bales, had seen
The dark-eyed merchants of the southern seas
In chaffer with the base Propoetides,
And heavy-hearted gat him home again,
His once-loved life grown idle, poor, and vain.

And there upon his images he cast
His weary eyes, yet little noted them,
As still from name to name his swift thought passed.
For what to him was Juno's well-wrought hem,
Diana's shaft, or Pallas' olive-stem?
What help could Hermes' rod unto him give,
Until with shadowy things he came to live?

Yet note, that though, while looking on the sun,
The craftsman o'er his work some morn of spring
May chide his useless labour never done,
For all his murmurs, with no other thing
He soothes his heart, and dulls thoughts' poisonous sting
And thus in thought's despite the world goes on;
And so it was with this Pygmalion.

Unto the chisel must he set his hand,
And slowly, still in troubled thought must pace,
About a work begun, that there doth stand,
And still returning to the self-same place,
Unto the image now must set his face,

And with a sigh his wonted toil begin,
Half-loathed, half-loved, a little rest to win.

The lessening marble that he worked upon,
A woman's form now imaged doubtfully,
And in such guise the work had he begun,
Because when he the untouched block did see
In wandering veins that form there seemed to be,
Whereon he cried out in a careless mood,
"O lady Venus, make this presage good !

"And then this block of stone shall be thy maid.
And, not without rich golden ornament,
Shall bide within thy quivering myrtle-shade."
So spoke he, but the goddess, well content,
Unto his hand such godlike mastery sent,
That like the first artificer he wrought,
Who made the gift that woe to all men brought.

And yet, but such as he was wont to do,
At first indeed that work divine he deemed,
And as the white chips from the chisel flew
Of other matters languidly he dreamed,
For easy to his hand that labour seemed,
And he was stirred with many a troubling thought,
And many a doubt perplexed him as he wrought.

And yet, again, at last there came a day
When smoother and more shapely grew the stone,

And he, grown eager, put all thought away
But that which touched his craftsmanship alone,
And he would gaze at what his hands had done,
Until his heart with boundless joy would swell
That all was wrought so wonderfully well.

Yet long it was ere he was satisfied,
And with his pride that by his mastery
This thing was done, whose equal far and wide
In no town of the world a man could see,
Came burning longing that the work should be
E'en better still, and to his heart there came
A strange and strong desire he could not name.

The night seemed long, and long the twilight seemed,
A vain thing seemed his flowery garden fair ;
Though through the night still of his work he dreamed,
And though his smooth-stemmed trees so nigh it were,
That thence he could behold the marble hair ;
Nought was enough, until with steel in hand
He came before the wondrous stone to stand.

No song could charm him, and no histories
Of men's misdoings could avail him now,
Nay, scarcely seaward had he turned his eyes,
If men had said, "The fierce Tyrrhenians row
Up through the bay, rise up and strike a blow
For life and goods ;" for nought to him seemed dear
But to his well-loved work to be anear.

Then vexed he grew, and knowing not his heart.
Unto himself he said, " Ah, what is this,
That I who oft was happy to depart,
And wander where the boughs each other kiss
'Neath the west wind, now have no other bliss
But in vain smoothing of this marble maid,
Whose chips this month a drachma had outweighed ?

" Lo I will get me to the woods and try
If I my woodcraft have forgotten quite,
And then, returning, lay this folly by,
And eat my fill, and sleep my sleep anight,
And 'gin to carve a Hercules aright
Upon the morrow, and perchance indeed
The Theban will be good to me at need."

With that he took his quiver and his bow,
And through the gates of Amathus he went,
And toward the mountain slopes began to go,
Within the woods to work out his intent.
Fair was the day, the honied beanfield's scent
The west wind bore unto him ; o'er the way
The glittering noisy poplar leaves did play.

' All things were moving ; as his hurried feet
Passed by, within the flowery swathe he heard
The sweeping of the scythe, the swallow fleet
Rose over him, the sitting partridge stirred
On the field's edge ; the brown bee by him whirled,

Or murmured in the clover flowers below.
But he with bowed-down head failed not to go.

At last he stopped, and, looking round, he said,
“ Like one whose thirtieth year is well gone by,
The day is getting ready to be dead ;
No rest, and on the border of the sky
Already the great banks of dark haze lie ;
No rest—what do I midst this stir and noise ?
What part have I in these unthinking joys ? ”

With that he turned, and toward the city-gate
Through the sweet fields went swifter than he came,
And cast his heart into the hands of fate ;
Nor strove with it, when higher 'gan to flame
That strange and strong desire without a name ;
Till panting, thinking of nought else, once more
His hand was on the latch of his own door.

One moment there he lingered, as he said,
“ Alas ! what should I do if she were gone ? ”
But even with that word his brow waxed red
To hear his own lips name a thing of stone,
As though the gods some marvel there had done,
And made his work alive ; and therewithal
In turn great pallor on his face did fall.

But with a sigh he passed into the house,
Yet even then his chamber-door must hold,

And listen there, half blind and timorous,
Until his heart should wax a little bold ;
Then entering, motionless and white and cold,
He saw the image stand amidst the floor
That whitened was by labour done before.

Blinded with tears, his chisel up he caught,
And, drawing near, and sighing, tenderly
Upon the marvel of the face he wrought,
E'en as he used to pass the long days by ;
But his sighs changed to sobbing presently,
And on the floor the useless steel he flung,
And, weeping loud, about the image clung.

" Alas !" he cried, " why have I made thee then,
That thus thou mockest me ? I know indeed
That many such as thou are loved of men,
Whose passionate eyes poor wretches still will lead
Into their net, and smile to see them bleed ;
But these the Gods made, and this hand made thee
Who wilt not speak one little word to me."

Then from the image did he draw aback
To gaze on it through tears : and you had said,
Regarding it, that little did it lack
To be a living and most lovely maid ;
Naked it was, its unbound locks were laid
Over the lovely shoulders ; with one hand
Reached out, as to a lover, did it stand,

The other held a fair rose over-blown ;
No smile was on the parted lips, the eyes
Seemed as if even now great love had shown
Unto them, something of its sweet surprise,
Yet saddened them with half-seen mysteries,
And still midst passion maiden-like she seemed,
As though of love unchanged for aye she dreamed.

Reproachfully beholding all her grace,
Pygmalion stood, until he grew dry-eyed,
And then at last he turned away his face
As if from her cold eyes his grief to hide ;
And thus a weary while did he abide,
With nothing in his heart but vain desire,
The ever-burning, unconsuming fire.

But when again he turned his visage round
His eyes were brighter and no more he wept,
As if some little solace he had found,
Although his folly none the more had slept,
Rather some new-born god-sent madness kept
His other madness from destroying him,
And made the hope of death wax faint and dim .

For, trembling and ashamed, from out the street
Strong men he called, and faint with jealousy
He caused them bear the ponderous, moveless feet
to the chamber where he used to lie,
a fair niche to his bed anigh,

Unwitting of his woe, they set it down,
Then went their ways beneath his troubled frown.

Then to his treasury he went, and sought
For gems for its adornment, but all there
Seemed to his eager eyes but poor and nought,
Not worthy e'en to touch her rippled hair,
So he, departing, through the streets 'gan fare,
And from the merchants at a mighty cost
Bought gems that kings for no good deed had lost.

These then he hung her senseless neck around,
Set on her fingers, and fair arms of stone,
Then cast himself before her on the ground,
Praying for grace for all that he had done
In leaving her untended and alone;
And still with every hour his madness grew
Though all his folly in his heart he knew.

At last asleep before her feet he lay,
Worn out with passion, yet this burning pain
Returned on him, when with the light of day
He woke and wept before her feet again;
Then of the fresh and new-born morning fain,
Into his garden passed, and therefrom bore
Fresh spoil of flowers his love to lay before.

A little altar, with fine gold o'erlaid,
Was in his house, that he a while ago

At some great man's command had deftly made,
And this he now must take and set below
Her well-wrought feet, and there must red flame glow
About sweet wood, and he must send her thence
The odour of Arabian frankincense.

Then as the smoke went up, he prayed and said,
"Thou, image, hear'st me not, nor wilt thou speak,
But I perchance shall know when I am dead,
If this has been some goddess' sport, to seek
A wretch, and in his heart infirm and weak
To set her glorious image, so that he,
Loving the form of immortality,

"May make much laughter for the gods above :
Hear me, and if my love mi liketh thee
Then take my life away, for I will love
Till death unfeared at last shall come to me,
And give me rest, if he of might may be
To slay the love of that which cannot die,
The heavenly beauty that can ne'er pass by."

No word indeed the moveless image said,
But with the sweet grave eyes his hands had wrought
Still gazed down on his bowed imploring head,
Yet his own words some solace to him brought,
Gilding the net wherein his soul was caught
With something like to hope, and all that day
The tender words he ever found to say ;

And still he felt as something heard him speak ;
Sometimes he praised her beauty, and sometimes
Reproached her in a feeble voice and weak,
And at the last drew forth a book of rhymes,
Wherein were writ the tales of many climes,
And read aloud the sweetness hid therein
Of lovers' sorrows and their tangled sin.

And when the sun went down, the frankincense
Again upon the altar-flame he cast
That through the open window floating thence
O'er the fresh odours of the garden passed ;
And so another day was gone at last,
And he no more his love-lorn watch could keep,
But now for utter weariness must sleep.

But in the night he dreamed that she was gone,
And knowing that he dreamed, tried hard to wake,
And could not, but forsaken and alone
He seemed to weep as though his heart would break,
And when the night her sleepy veil did take
From off the world, waking, his tears he found
Still wet upon the pillow all around.

• Then at the first, bewildered by those tears,
He fell a-wondering wherefore he had wept,
But suddenly remembering all his fears,
Panting with terror, from the bed he leapt,
But still its wonted place the image kept,

Nor moved for all the joyful ecstasy
Wherewith he blessed the day that showed it nigh.

Then came the morning offering and the day,
Midst flowers and words of love and kisses sweet
From morn, through noon, to evening passed away,
And scarce unhappy, crouching at her feet
He saw the sun descend the sea to meet ;
And scarce unhappy through the darkness crept
Unto his bed, and midst soft dreaming slept.

BUT the next morn, e'en while the incense-smoke
At sun-rising curled round about her head,
Sweet sound of songs the wonted quiet broke
Down in the street, and he by something led,
He knew not what, must leave his prayer unsaid,
And through the freshness of the morn must see
The folk who went with that sweet minstrelsy ;

Damsels and youths in wonderful attire,
And in their midst upon a car of gold
An image of the Mother of Desire,
Wrought by his hands in days that seemed grown old
Though those sweet limbs a garment did enfold,
Coloured like flame, enwrought with precious things,
Lost fit to be the prize of striving kings.

Then ~~he~~ remembered that the manner was
That fair-clad priests the lovely Queen should take
Thrice in the year, and through the city pass,
And with sweet songs the dreaming folk awake ;
And through the clouds a light there seemed to break
When he remembered all the tales well told
About her glorious kindly deeds of old.

So his unfinished prayer he finished not,
But, kneeling, once more kissed the marble feet,
And, while his heart with many thoughts waxed hot,
He clad himself with fresh attire and meet
For that bright service, and with blossoms sweet
Entwined with tender leaves he crowned his head,
And followed after as the goddess led.

But long and vain unto him seemed the way
Until they came unto her house again ;
Long years, the while they went about to lay
The honey-hiding dwellers on the plain,
The sweet companions of the yellowing grain
Upon her golden altar ; long and long
Before, at end of their delicious song,

· They stripped her of her weed with reverend hand
And showed the ivory limbs his hand had wrought ;
Yea, and too long e'en then ere those fair bands,
Dispersing here and there, the shadow sought
Of Indian spice-trees o'er the warm sea brought

And toward the splashing of the fountain turned,
Mocked the noon sun that o'er the cloisters burned.

But when the crowd of worshippers was gone,
And through the golden dimness of the place
The goddess' very servants paced alone,
Or some lone damsel murmured of her case
Apart from prying eyes, he turned his face
Unto that image made with toil and care,
In days when unto him it seemed most fair.

Dusky and dim, though rich with gems and gold,
The house of Venus was ; high in the dome
The burning sun-light you might now behold,
From nowhere else the light of day might come,
To curse the Shame-faced Mother's lovely home ;
A long way off the shrine, the fresh sea-breeze,
Now just arising, brushed the myrtle-trees.

The torches of the flower-crowned, singing band
Erewhile, indeed, made more than daylight there
Lighting the painted tales of many a land,
And carven heroes, with their unused glare ;
But now a few soft, glimmering lamps there were,
And on the altar a thin, flickering flame
Just showed the golden letters of her name.

Blue in the dome yet hung the incense-cloud,
And still its perfume lingered all around ;

And, trodden by the light-foot, fervent crowd,
Thick lay the summer flowers upon the ground,
And now from far-off halls uprose the sound
Of Lydian music, and the dancer's cry,
As though some door were opened suddenly.

So there he stood, that help from her to gain,
Bewildered by that twilight midst of day ;
Downcast with listening to the joyous strain
He had no part in, hopeless with delay
Of all the fair things he had meant to say ;
Yet, as the incense on the flame he cast, [passed,—
From stammering lips and pale these words there

“ O thou forgotten help, dost thou yet know
What thing it is I need, when even I,
Bent down before thee in this shame and woe,
Can frame no set of words to tell thee why
I needs must pray, O help me or I die !
Or slay me, and in slaying take from me
Even a dead man's feeble memory.

“ Say not thine help I have been slow to seek ;
Here have I been from the first hour of morn,
Who stand before thy presence faint and weak,
Of my one poor delight left all forlorn ;
Trembling with many fears, the hope outworn
I had when first I left my love, my shame,
To call upon thine oft-sung glorious name.”

He stopped to catch his breath, for as a sob
Did each word leave his mouth ; but suddenly,
Like a live thing, the thin flame 'gan to throb
And gather force, and then shot up on high
A steady spike of light, that drew anigh
The sunbeam in the dome, then sank once more
Into a feeble flicker as before.

But at that sight the nameless hope he had
That kept him living midst unhappiness,
Stirred in his breast, and with changed face and glad
Unto the image forward must he press
With words of praise his first word to redress,
But then it was as though a thick black cloud
Altar, and fire, and ivory limbs did shroud.

He staggered back, amazed and full of awe ;
But when, with anxious eyes, he gazed around,
About him still the worshippers he saw
Sunk in their wonted works, with no surprise
At what to him seemed awful mysteries ;
Therewith he sighed and said, " This, too, I dream,
No better day upon my life shall beam."

And yet for long upon the place he gazed •
Where other folk beheld the lovely Queen ;
And while he looked the dusky veil seemed raised,
And every thing was as it erst had been ;
And then he said, " Such marvels I have seen

As some sick man may see from off his bed :
Ah, I am sick, and would that I were dead !”

Therewith, not questioning his heart at all,
He turned away and left the holy place,
When now the wide sun reddened towards his fall,
And a fresh west wind held the clouds in chase ;
But coming out, at first he hid his face
Dazed with the light, and in the porch he stood,
Nor wished to move, or change his dreary mood.

Yet in a while the freshness of the eve
Pierced to his weary heart, and with a sigh
He raised his head, and slowly 'gan to leave
The high carved pillars ; and so presently
Had passed the grove of whispering myrtles by,
And, mid the many noises of the street,
Made himself brave the eyes of men to meet.

Thronged were the ways with folk in gay attire,
Nursing the end of that festivity ;
Girls fit to move the moody man's desire
Brushed past him, and soft dainty minstrelsy
He heard amid the laughter, and might see,
Through open doors, the garden's green delight,
Where pensive lovers waited for the night ;

Or resting dancers round the fountain drawn,
With faces flushed unto the breeze turned round,

Or wandering o'er the fragrant trodden lawn,
Took up their fallen garlands from the ground,
Or languidly their scattered tresses bound,
Or let their gathered raiment fall adown,
With eyes downcast beneath their lovers' frown.

What hope Pygmalion yet might have, when he
First left the pillars of the dreamy place,
Amid such sights had vanished utterly.
He turned his weary eyes from face to face,
Nor noted them, as at a lagging pace
He gat towards home, and still was murmuring,
"Ah life, sweet life ! the only godlike thing !"

And as he went, though longing to be there
Whereas his sole desire awaited him,
Yet did he loath to see the image fair,
White and unchanged of face, unmoved of limb,
And to his heart came dreamy thoughts and dim
That unto some strange region he might come,
Nor ever reach again his loveless home.

Yet soon, indeed, before his door he stood,
And, as a man awaking from a dream,
Seemed waked from his old folly ; nought seemed good
In all the things that he before had deemed
At least worth life, and on his heart there streamed
Cold light of day—he found himself alone,
Reft of desire, all love and madness gone.

And yet for that past folly must he weep,
As one might mourn the parted happiness
That, mixed with madness, made him smile in sleep ;
And still some lingering sweetness seemed to bless
The hard life left of toil and loneliness,
Like a past song too sweet, too short, and yet
Emmeshed for ever in the memory's net.

Weeping he entered, murmuring, " O fair Queen,
I thank thee that my prayer was not for nought,
Truly a present helper hast thou been
To those who faithfully thy throne have sought !
Yet, since with pain deliverance I have bought,
Hast thou not yet some gift in store for me,
That I thine happy slave henceforth may be ? "

THUS to his chamber at the last he came,
And, pushing through the still half-opened door,
He stood within ; but there, for very shame
Of all the things that he had done before,
Still kept his eyes bent down upon the floor,
Thinking of all that he had done and said
Since he had wrought that luckless marble maid.

Yet soft his thoughts were, and the very place
Seemed perfumed with some nameless heavenly air

So gaining courage, did he raise his face
Unto the work his hands had made so fair,
And cried aloud to see the niche all bare
Of that sweet form, while through his heart again
There shot a pang of his old yearning pain.

Yet while he stood, and knew not what to do
With yearning, a strange thrill of hope there came,
A shaft of new desire now pierced him through,
And therewithal a soft voice called his name,
And when he turned, with eager eyes aflame,
He saw betwixt him and the setting sun
The lively image of his loved one.

He trembled at the sight, for though her eyes,
Her very lips, were such as he had made,
And though her tresses fel' but in such guise
As he had wrought them, now was she arrayed
In that fair garment that the priests had laid
Upon the goddess on that very morn,
Dyed like the setting sun upon the corn.

Speechless he stood, but she now drew anear,
Simple and sweet as she was wont to be,
And once again her silver voice rang clear,
Filling his soul with great felicity,
And thus she spoke, "Wilt thou not come to me.
O dear companion of my new-found life,
For I am called thy lover and thy wife?"

“Listen, these words the Dread One bade me say
That was with me e'en now, *Pygmalion*,
My new-made soul I give to thee to-day,
Come, feel the sweet breath that thy prayer has won,
And lay thine hand this heaving breast upon !
Come love, and walk with me between the trees,
And feel the freshness of the evening breeze.

*“Sweep mine hair round thy neck ; behold my feet,
The oft-kissed feet thou thoughtst should never more,
Press down the daisies ! draw me to thee, sweet,
And feel the warm heart of thy living love
Beat against thine, and bless the Seed of Jove
Whose loving tender heart hath wrought all this,
And wrapped us both in such a cloud of bliss.*

“Ah, thou art wise to know what this may mean !
Sweet seem the words to me, and needs must I
Speak all the lesson of the lovely Queen :
But this I know, I would we were more nigh,
I have not heard thy voice but in the cry
Thou utteredst then, when thou believedst gone
The marvel of thine hands, the maid of stone.”

She reached her hand to him, and with kind eyes
Gazed into his ; but he the fingers caught
And drew her to him, and midst ecstasies
Passing all words, yea, well-nigh passing thought,
Felt that sweet breath that he so long had sought,

Felt the warm life within her heaving breast
As in his arms his living love he pressed.

But as his cheek touched hers he heard her say,
"Wilt thou not speak, O love? why dost thou weep?
Art thou then sorry for this long-wished day,
Or dost thou think perchance thou wilt not keep
This that thou holdest, but in dreamy sleep?
Nay, let us do the bidding of the Queen,
And hand in hand walk through thy garden green;

"Then shalt thou tell me, still beholding me,
Full many things whereof I wish to know,
And as we walk from whispering tree to tree
Still more familiar to thee shall I grow,
And such things shalt thou say unto me now
As when thou deemedst thou wast quite alone,
A madman, kneeling to a thing of stone."

But at that word a smile lit up his eyes
And therewithal he spake some loving word,
And she at first looked up in grave surprise
When his deep voice and musical she heard,
And clung to him as somewhat grown afraid;
Then cried aloud and said, "O mighty one!
What joy with thee to look upon the sun."

Then into that fair garden did they pass
And all the story of his love he told,

And as the twain went o'er the dewy grass,
Beneath the risen moon could he behold
The bright tears trickling down, then, waxen bold,
He stopped and said, "Ah, love, what meaneth this?
Seest thou how tears still follow earthly bliss?"

Then both her white arms round his neck she threw,
And sobbing said, "O love, what hurteth me?
When first the sweetness of my life I knew,
Not this I felt, but when I first saw thee
A little pain and great felicity
Rose up within me, and thy talk e'en now
Made pain and pleasure ever greater grow?"

"O sweet," he said, "this thing is even love,
Whereof I told thee; that all wise men fear,
But yet escape not; nay, to gods above,
Unless the old tales lie, it draweth near.
But let my happy cars I pray thee hear
Thy story too, and how thy blessed birth
Has made a heaven of this once lonely earth."

"My sweet," she said, "as yet I am not wise.
Or stored with words, aright the tale to tell,
But listen: when I opened first mine eyes
I stood within the niche thou knowest well,
And from mine hand a heavy thing there fell
Carved like these flowers, nor could I see things clear,
And but a strange confused noise could hear.

“At last mine eyes could see a woman fair,
But awful as this round white moon o’erhead,
So that I trembled when I saw her there,
For with my life was born some touch of dread,
And therewithal I heard her voice that said,
‘Come down, and learn to love and be alive,
For thee, a well-prized gift, to-day I give.’

“Then on the floor I stepped, rejoicing much,
Not knowing why, not knowing aught at all,
Till she reached out her hand my breast to touch,
And when her fingers thereupon did fall,
Thought came unto my life, and therewithal
I knew her for a goddess, and began
To murmur in some tongue unknown to man.

“And then indeed not in this guise was I,
No sandals had I, and no saffron gown,
But naked as thou knowest utterly,
E’en as my limbs beneath thine hand had grown,
And this fair perfumed robe then fell adown
Over the goddess’ feet and swept the ground,
And round her loins a glittering belt was bound.

“But when the stammering of my tongue she heard
Upon my trembling lips her hand she laid,
And spoke again, ‘Nay, say not any word,
All that thine heart would say I know unsaid,
Who even now thine heart and voice have made ;

But listen rather, for thou knowest now
What these words mean, and still wilt wiser grow.

“ ‘Thy body, lifeless till I gave it life,
A certain man, my servant, well hath wrought,
I give thee to him as his love and wife,
With all thy dowry of desire and thought,
Since this his yearning heart hath ever sought ;
Now from my temple is he on the way,
Deeming to find thee e'en as yesterday ;

“ ‘Bide thou his coming by t'ie bed-head there,
And when thou seest him set his eyes upon
Thine empty niche, and hear'st him cry for care,
Then call him by his name, Pygmalion,
And certainly thy lover hast thou won ;
But when he stands before thee silently,
Say all these words that I shall teach to thee.’

“With that she said what first I told thee, love,
And then went on, ‘Moreover thou shalt say
That I, the daughter of almighty Jove,
Have wrought for him this long-desired day ;
In sign whereof, these things that pass away,
Wherein mine image men have well arrayed,
I give thee for thy wedding gear, O maid.’

“Therewith her raiment she put off from her,
And laid bare all her perfect loveliness,

And, smiling on me, came yet more anear,
And on my mortal lips her lips did press,
And said, 'Now herewith shalt thou love no less
Than Psyche loved my son in days of old ;
Farewell, of thee shall many a tale be told.'

"And even with that last word was she gone,
How, I know not, and I my limbs arrayed
In her fair gifts, and waited thee alone—
Ah, love, indeed the word is true she said,
For now I love thee so, I grow afraid
Of what the gods upon our heads may send—
I love thee so, I think upon the end."

What words he said ? How can I tell again
What words they said beneath the glimmering light,
Some tongue they used unknown to loveless men
As each to each they told their great delight,
Until for stillness of the growing night
Their soft sweet murmuring words seemed growing loud,
And dim the moon grew, hid by fleecy cloud.

SUCH was the ending of his ancient rhyme,
That seemed to fit that soft and golden time,
When men were happy, they could scarce tell why,
Although they felt the rich year slipping by.
The sun went down, the harvest-moon arose,
And 'twixt the slim trees of that fruitful close
They saw the corn still falling 'neath its light,
While through the soft air of the windless night
The voices of the reapers' mates rang clear
In measured song, as of the fruitful year
They told, and its delights, and now and then
The rougher voices of the toiling men
Joined in the song, as one by one released
From that hard toil, they sauntered towards the feast
That waited them upon the strip of grass
That through the golden glimmering sea did pass.

But those old men, glad to have lived so long,
Sat listening through the twilight to the song,
And when the night grew and all things were still
Throughout the wide vale from green hill to hill
Unto a happy harvesting they drank
Till once more o'er the hills the white moon sank.

AUGUST had not gone by, though now was stored
In the sweet-smelling granaries all the hoard
Of golden corn ; the land had made her gain,
And winter should howl round her doors in vain.
But o'er the same fields grey now and forlorn
The old men sat and heard the swineherd's horn,
Far off across the stubble, when the day
At end of harvest-tide was sad and grey ;
And rain was in the wind's voice as it swept
Along the hedges where the lone quail crept,
Beneath the chattering of the restless pie.
The fruit-hung branches moved, and suddenly
The trembling apples smote the dewless grass,
And all the year to autumn-tide did pass.
E'en such a day it was as young men love
When swiftly through the veins the blood doth move,
And they, whose eyes can see not death at all,
To thoughts of stirring deeds and pleasure fall,
Because it seems to them to tell of life
After the dreamy days devoid of strife,
When every day with sunshine is begun,
And cloudless skies receive the setting sun.

On such a day the older folk were fain
Of something new somewhat to dull the pain
Of sad, importunate old memories
That to their weary hearts must needs arise.

Alas ! what new things on that day could come
From hearts that now so long had been the home
Of such dull thoughts, nay, rather let them tell
Some tale that fits their ancient longings well.

Rolf was the speaker, who said, " Friends, behold
This is e'en such a tale as those once told
Unto my greedy ears by Nicholas,
Before our quest for nothing came to pass."

OGIER THE DANE.

ARGUMENT.

WHEN Ogier was born, six fay ladies came to the cradle where he lay, and gave him various gifts, as to be brave and happy and the like ; but the sixth gave him to be her love when he should have lived long in the world : so Ogier grew up and became the greatest of knights, and at last, after many years, fell into the hands of that fay, and with her, as the story tells, he lives now, though he returned once to the world, as is shown in the process of this tale.

WITHIN some Danish city by the sea,
Whose name, changed now, is all unknown
to me,

Great mourning was there one fair summer eve,
Because the angels, bidden to receive
The fair Queen's lovely soul in Paradise,
Had done their bidding, and in royal guise
Her helpless body, once the prize of love,
Unable now for fear or hope to move,
Lay underneath the golden canopy ;
And bowed down by unkingly misery
The King sat by it, and not far away,

Within the chamber a fair man-child lay,
His mother's bane, the king that was to be,
Not witting yet of any royalty,
Harmless and loved, although so new to life.

Calm the June evening was, no sign of strife
The clear sky showed, no storm grew round the sun,
Unhappy that his day of bliss was done ;
Dumb was the sea, and if the beech-wood stirred,
'Twas with the nestling of the grey-winged bird
Midst its thick leaves ; and though the nightingale
Her ancient, hapless sorrow must bewail,
No more of woe there seemed in her song
Than such as doth to lovers' words belong,
Because their love is still unsatisfied.

But to the King, on that sweet eventide,
No earth there seemed, no heaven when earth was gone ;
No help, no God ! but lonely pain alone ;
And he, midst unreal shadows, seemed to sit
Himself the very heart and soul of it.
But round the cradle of the new-born child
The nurses now the weary time beguiled
With stories of the just departed Queen ;
And how, amid the heathen folk first seen,
She had been won to love and godliness ;
And as they spoke, e'en midst his dull distress,
An eager whisper now and then would smite
Upon the King's ear, of some past delight,
Some once familiar name, and he would raise

His weary head, and on the speaker gaze
Like one about to speak, but soon again
Would drop his head and be alone with pain,
Nor think of these ; who, silent in their turn,
Would sit and watch the waxen tapers burn
Amidst the dusk of the quick-gathering night,
Until beneath the high stars' glimmering light,
The fresh earth lay in colourless repose.

So past the night, and now and then one rose
From out her place to do what might avail
To still the new-born infant's fretful wail ;
Or through the softly-opened door there came
Some nurse new waked, who, whispering low the name
Of her whose turn was come, would take her place ;
Then toward the King would turn about her face
And to her fellows whisper of the day,
And tell again of her just past away.

So passed the night, the moon arose and grew,
From off the sea a little west-wind blew,
Rustling the garden-leaves like sudden rain ;
And ere the moon had 'gun to fall again
'The wind grew cold, a change was in the sky,
And in deep silence did the dawn draw nigh :
Then from her place a nurse arose to light
Fresh hallowed lights, for, dying with the night,
The tapers round about the dead Queen were ;
But the King raised his head and 'gan to stare
Upon her, as her sweeping gown did glide

About the floor, that in the stillness cried
Beneath her careful feet ; and now as she
Had lit the second candle carefully,
And on its silver spike another one
Was setting, through her body did there run
A sudden tremor, and the hand was stayed
That on the dainty painted wax was laid ;
Her eyelids fell down and she seemed to sleep,
And o'er the staring King began to creep
Sweet slumber too ; the bitter lines of woe
That drew his weary face did softer grow,
His eyelids dropped, his arms fell to his side ;
And moveless in their places did abide
The nursing women, held by some strong spell,
E'en as they were, and utter silence fell
Upon the mournful, glimmering chamber fair.

But now light footsteps coming up the stair,
Smote on the deadly stillness, and the sound
Of silken dresses trailing o'er the ground ;
And heavenly odours through the chamber passed,
Unlike the scents that rose and lily cast
Upon the freshness of the dying night ;
Then nigher drew the sound of footsteps light
Until the door swung open noiselessly—
A mass of sunlit flowers there seemed to be
Within the doorway, and but pale and wan
The flame showed now that serveth mortal man,
As one by one six seeming ladies passed
Into the room, and o'er its sorrow cast

That thoughtless sense of joy bewildering,
That kisses youthful hearts amidst of spring ;
Crowned were they, in such glorious raiment clad,
As yet no merchant of the world has had
Within his coffers ; yet those crowns seemed fair
Only because they kissed their odorous hair,
And all that flowery raiment was but blessed
By those fair bodies that its splendour pressed.

Now to the cradle from that glorious band,
A woman passed, and laid a tender hand
Upon the babe, and gently drew aside
The swathings soft that did his body hide ;
And, seeing him so fair and great, she smiled,
And stooped, and kissed him, saying, " O noble child,
Have thou a gift from Gloriande this day ;
For to the time when life shall pass away
From this dear heart, no fear of death or shame,
No weariness of good shall foul thy name."

So saying, to her sisters she returned ;
And one came forth, upon whose brow there burned
A crown of rubies, and whose heaving breast
With happy rings a golden hauberk pressed ;
She took the babe, and somewhat frowning said,
" This gift I give, that till thy limbs are laid
At rest for ever, to thine honoured life
There never shall be lacking war and strife,
That thou a long-enduring name mayst win,
And by thy deeds, good pardon for thy sin."

With that another, who, unseen, meanwhile

Had drawn anigh, said with a joyous smile,
" And this forgotten gift to thee I give,
That while amidst the turmoil thou dost live,
Still shalt thou win the game, and unto thee
Defeat and shame but idle words shall be."

Then back they turned, and therewithal, the fourth
Said, " Take this gift for what it may be worth
For that is mine to give ; lo, thou shalt be
Gentle of speech, and in all courtesy
The first of men : a little gift this is,
After these promises of fame and bliss."

Then toward the babe the fifth fair woman went ;
Grey-eyed she was, and simple, with eyes bent
Down on the floor, parted her red lips were,
And o'er her sweet face marvellously fair
Oft would the colour spread full suddenly ;
Clad in a dainty gown and thin was she,
For some green summer of the fay-land dight,
Tripping she went, and laid her fingers light
Upon the child, and said, " O little one,
As long as thou shalt look upon the sun
Shall women long for thee ; take heed to this
And give them what thou canst of love and bliss."

Then, blushing for her words, therefrom she past,
And by the cradle stood the sixth and last,
The fairest of them all ; awhile she gazed
Down on the child, and then her hand she raised,
And made the one side of her bosom bare ;
" Ogier," she said, " if this be foul or fair

Thou know'st not now, but when thine earthly life
Is drunk out to the dregs, and war and strife
Have yielded thee whatever joy they may,
Thine head upon this bosom shalt thou lay ;
And then, despite of knowledge or of God,
Will we be glad upon the flowery sod
Within the happy country where I dwell :
Ogier, my love that is to be, farewell !”

She turned, and even as they came they passed
From out the place, and reached the gate at last
That oped before their feet, and speedily
They gained the edges of the murmuring sea,
• And as they stood in silence, gazing there
Out to the west, they vanished into air, .
I know not how, nor whereto they returned.

But mixed with twilight in the chamber burned
The flickering candles, and those dreary folk,
Unlike to sleepers, from their trance awoke,
But nought of what had happed meanwhile they knew
Through the half-opened casements now there blew
A sweet fresh air, that of the flowers and sea
Mingled together, smelt deliciously,
And from the unseen sun the spreading light
• Began to make the fair June blossoms bright,
And midst their weary woe uprose the sun,
And thus has Ogier's noble life begun.

HOPE is our life, when first our life grows clear ;
Hope and delight, scarce crossed by lines of fear,
Yet the day comes when fain we would not hope,
But forasmuch as we with life must cope,
Struggling with this and that, and who knows why ?
Hope will not give us up to certainty,
But still must bide with us : and with this man,
Whose life amid such promises began
Great things she wrought ; but now the time has come
When he no more on earth may have his home.

Great things he suffered, great delights he had,
Unto great kings he gave good deeds for bad ;
He ruled o'er kingdoms where his name no more
Is had in memory, and on many a shore
He left his sweat and blood to win a name
Passing the bounds of earthly creatures' fame.
A love he won and lost, a well-loved son
Whose little day of promise soon was done :
A tender wife he had, that he must leave
Before his heart her love could well receive ;
'Those promised gifts, that on his careless head
In those first hours of his fair life were shed
He took unwitting, and unwitting spent,
Nor gave himself to grief and discontent
Because he saw the end a-drawing nigh.

Where is he now ? in what land must he die,
To leave an empty name to us on earth ?
A tale half true, to cast across our mirth
Some pensive thoughts of life that might have been ;
Where is he now, that all this life has seen ?

Behold, another eve I bid you see
Than that calm eve of his nativity ;
The sun is setting in the west, the sky
Is clear and hard, and no clouds come anigh
The golden orb, but further off they lie,
Steel-grey and black with edges red as blood,
And underneath them is the weltering flood
Of some huge sea, whose tumbling hills, as they
Turn restless sides about, are black or grey,
Or green, or glittering with the golden flame ;
The wind has fallen now, but still the same
The mighty army moves, as if to drown
This lone, bare rock, whose sheer scarped sides of brown
Cast off the weight of waves in clouds of spray.

Alas ! what ships upon an evil day
Bent over to the wind in this ill sea ?
What navy, whose rent bones lie wretchedly
Beneath these cliffs ? a mighty one it was,
A fearful storm to bring such things to pass.

This is the loadstone rock ; no armament
Of warring nations, in their madness bent
Their course this way ; no merchant wittingly

Has steered his keel unto this luckless sea ;
Upon no shipman's card its name is writ,
Though worn-out mariners will speak of it
Within the ingle on the winter's night,
When all within is warm and safe and bright,
And the wind howls without : but 'gainst their will
Are some folk driven here, and then all skill
Against this evil rock is vain and nought,
And unto death the shipmen soon are brought ;
For then the keel, as by a giant's hand,
Is drawn unto that mockery of a land,
And presently unto its sides doth cleave ;
When if they 'scape swift death, yet none may leave
The narrow limits of that barren isle,
And thus are slain by famine in a while
Mocked, as they say, by night with images
Of noble castles among groves of trees,
By day with sounds of merry minstrelsy.

The sun sinks now below this hopeless sea,
The clouds are gone, and all the sky is bright ;
The moon is rising o'er the growing night,
And by its light may ye behold the bones
Of generations of these luckless ones
Scattered about the rock ; but nigh the sea
Sits one alive, who uncomplainingly
Awaits his death. White-haired is he and old,
Arrayed in royal raiment, bright with gold,
But tarnished with the waves and rough salt air ;

Huge is he, of a noble face and fair,
As for an ancient man, though toil and eld
Furrow the cheeks that ladies once beheld
With melting hearts—Nay, listen, for he speaks !

“God, thou hast made me strong ! nigh seven weeks
Have passed since from the wreck we haled our store,
And five long days well told, have now passed o’er
Since my last fellow died, with my last bread
Between his teeth, and yet I am not dead.
Yea, but for this I had been strong enow
In some last bloody field my sword to show.
What matter ? soon will all be past and done,
Where’er I died I must have died alone :
Yet, Carahcu, a good death had it been
Dying, thy face above me to have seen,
And heard my banner flapping in the wind,
Then, though my memory had not left thy mind,
Yet hope and fear would not have vexed thee more
When thou hadst known that everything was o’er ;
But now thou waitest, still expecting me,
Whose sail shall never speck thy bright blue sea.

“And thou, Clarice, the merchants thou mayst call,
To tell thee tales within thy pictured hall,
But never shall they tell true tales of me :
Whatever sails the Kentish hills may see
Swept by the flood-tide toward thy well-walled town,
No more on my sails shall they look adown.

“Get thee another leader, Charlemaine,
For thou shalt look to see my shield in vain,

When in the fair fields of the Frankish land,
Thick as the corn they tread, the heathen stand.

“What matter? ye shall learn to live your lives;
Husbands and children, other friends and wives,
Shall wipe the tablets of your memory clean,
And all shall be as I had never been.

“And now, O God, am I alone with Thee;
A little thing indeed it seems to be
To give this life up, since it needs must go
Some time or other; now at last I know
How foolishly men play upon the earth,
When unto them a year of life seems worth
Honour and friends, and these vague hopes and sweet
That like real things my dying heart do greet,
Unreal while living on the earth I trod,
And but myself I knew no other god.
Behold, I thank Thee that Thou sweet’nest thus
This end, that I had thought most piteous,
If of another I had heard it told.”

What man is this, who weak and worn and old,
Gives up his life within that dreadful isle,
And on the fearful coming death can smile?
Alas! this man, so battered and outworn,
Is none but he, who, on that summer morn,
Received such promises of glorious life:
Ogie the Dane this is, to whom all strife
Was but as wine to stir awhile the blood,

To whom all life, however hard, was good :
This is the man, unmatched of heart and limb,
Ogier the Dane, whose sight has waxed not dim
For all the years that he on earth has dwelt ;
Ogier the Dane, that never fear has felt,
Since he knew good from ill ; Ogier the Dane,
The heathen's dread, the evil-doer's bane :

BRIGHT had the moon grown as his words were
done,

And no more was there memory of the sun.
Within the west, and he grew drowsy now,
And somewhat smother was his wrinkled brow
As thought died out beneath the hand of sleep,
And o'er his soul forgetfulness did creep,
Hiding the image of swift-coming death ;
Until as peacefully he drew his breath
As on that day, past for a hundred years,
When, midst the nurse's quickly-falling tears,
He fell asleep to his first lullaby.

The night changed as he slept, white clouds and high
Began about the lonely moon to close ;
And from the dark west a new wind arose,
And with the sound of heavy-falling waves
Mingled its pipe about the loadstone caves ;

But when the twinkling stars were hid away,
And a faint light and broad, like dawn of day,
The moon upon that dreary country shed,
Oger awoke, and lifting up his head
And smiling, muttered, "Nay, no more again;
Rather some pleasure new, some other pain,
Unthought of both, some other form of strife;"
For he had waked from dreams of his old life,
And through St. Omer's archer-guarded gate
Once more had seemed to pass, and saw the state
Of that triumphant king; and still, though all
Seemed changed, and folk by other names did call
Faces he knew of old, yet none the less
He seemed the same, and, midst that mightiness,
Felt his own power, and grew the more athirst
For coming glory, as of old, when first
He stood before the face of Charlemaine,
A helpless hostage with all life to gain.

But now, awake, his worn face once more sank
Between his hands, and, murmuring not, he drank
The draught of death that must that thirst allay.

But while he sat and waited for the day
A sudden light across the bare rock streamed,
Which at the first he noted not, but deemed
The moon her fleecy veil had broken through;
But ruddier indeed this new light grew
Than were the moon's grey beams, and, therewithal,
Soft far-off music on his ears did fall;

Yet moved he not, but murmured, "This is death,
An easy thing like this to yield my breath,
Awake, yet dreaming, with no sounds of fear,
No dreadful sights to tell me it is near ;
Yea, God, I thank Thee !" but with that last word
It seemed to him that he his own name heard
Whispered, as though the wind had borne it past ;
With that he gat unto his feet at last,
But still awhile he stood, with sunken head,
And in a low and trembling voice he said,
" Lord, I am ready, whither shall I go ?
I pray Thee unto me some token show."
And, as he said this, round about he turned,
And in the east beheld a light that burned
As bright as day ; then, though his flesh might fear
The coming change that he believed so near,
Yet did his soul rejoice, for now he thought
Unto the very heaven to be brought :
And though he felt alive, deemed it might be
That he in sleep had died full easily.

Then toward that light did he begin to go,
And still those strains he heard, far off and low,
That grew no louder ; still that bright light streamed
Over the rocks, yet nothing brighter seemed,
But like the light of some unseen bright flame •
Shone round about, until at last he came
Unto the dreary islet's other shore,
And then the minstrelsy he heard no more,
And softer seemed the strange light unto him ;

But yet or ever it had grown quite dim,
Beneath its waning light could he behold
A mighty palace set about with gold,
Above green meads and groves of summer trees
Far-off across the welter of the seas ;
But, as he gazed, it faded from his sight,
And the grey hidden moon's diffused soft light
Which soothly was but darkness to him now,
His sea-girt island prison did but show.

But o'er the sea he still gazed wistfully,
And said, " Alas! and when will this go by
And leave my soul in peace? must I still dream
Of life that once so dear a thing did seem,
That, when I wake, death may the bitterer be?
Here will I sit until he come to me,
And hide mine eyes and think upon my sin,
That so a little calm I yet may win
Before I stand within the awful place."

Then down he sat and covered up his face,
Yet therewithal his trouble could not hide,
Nor waiting thus for death could he abide,
For, though he knew it not, the yearning pain
Of hope of life had touched his soul again—
If he could live awhile, if he could live!
The mighty being, who once was wont to give
The gift of life to many a trembling man;
Who did his own will since his life began;
Who feared not aught, but strong and great and free,
Still cast aside the thought of what might be;

Must all this then be lost, and with no will,
Powerless and blind, must he some fate fulfil,
Nor know what he is doing any more ?

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Soon he arose and paced along the shore,
And gazed out seaward for the blessed light ;
But nought he saw except the old sad sight,
The ceaseless tumbling of the billows grey,
The white upspringing of the spurts of spray
Amidst that mass of timbers, the rent bones
Of the sea-houses of the hapless ones
Once cast like him upon this deadly isle.

He stopp'd his pacing in a little while,
And clenched his mighty hands, and set his teeth,
And gazing at the ruin underneath,
He swung from off the bare cliff's jagged brow,
And on some slippery ledge he wavered now,
Without a hand-hold, and now stoutly clung
With hands alone, and o'er the welter hung,
Not caring aught if thus his life should end ;
But safely midst all this did he descend
The dreadful cliff, and since no beach was there.
But from the depths the rock rose stark and bare.
Nor crumbled aught beneath the hammering sea,
(Upon the wrecks he stood unsteadily.

But now, amid the clamour of the waves,
'And washing to-and-fro of beams and staves,
Dizzy with hunger, dreamy with distress,

And all those days of fear and loneliness,
The ocean's tumult seemed the battle's roar,
His heart grew hot, as when in days of yore
He heard the cymbals clash amid the crowd
Of dusky faces ; now he shouted loud,
And from crushed beam to beam began to leap,
And yet his footing somehow did he keep
Amidst their tossing, and indeed the sea
Was somewhat sunk upon the island's lee.
So quickly on from wreck to wreck he passed,
And reached the outer line of wrecks at last,
And there a moment stood unsteadily,
Amid the drift of spray that hurried by,
And drew Courtain his sword from out its sheath,
And poised himself to meet the coming death,
Still looking out to sea ; but as he gazed,
And once or twice his doubtful feet he raised
To take the final plunge, that heavenly strain
Over the washing waves he heard again,
And from the dimness something bright he saw
Across the waste of waters towards him draw ;
And hidden now, now raised aloft, at last
Unto his very feet a boat was cast,
Gilded inside and out, and well arrayed
With cushions soft ; far fitter to have weighed
From some sweet garden on the shallow Seine,
Or in a reach of green Thames to have lain,
Than struggle with that huge confusèd sea ;
But Ogier gazed upon it doubtfully

One moment, and then, sheathing Courtain, said.
“What tales are these about the newly dead
The heathen told? what matter, let all pass;
This moment as one dead indeed I was,
And this must be what I have got to do,
I yet perchance may light on something new
Before I die; though yet perchance this keel
Unto the wondrous mass of charmed steel
Is drawn as others.” With that word he leapt
Into the boat, and o’er the cushions crept
From stem to stern, but found no rudder there,
Nor any oars, nor were the cushions fair
Made wet by any dashing of the sea.

Now while he pondered how these things could be,
The boat began to move therefrom at last,
But over him a drowsiness was cast,
And as o’er tumbling hills the skiff did pass,
He clean forgot his death and where he was.

At last he woke up to a sunny day,
And, looking round, saw that his shallop lay
Moored at the edge of some fair tideless sea
Unto an overhanging thick-leaved tree,
Where in the green waves did the low bank dip
Its fresh and green grass-covered daisied lip;
But Ogier looking thence no more could see
That sad abode of death and misery,
Nor aught but wide and empty ocean, grey
With gathering haze, for now it neared midday;

Then from the golden cushions did he rise,
And wondering still if this were Paradise
He stepped ashore, but drew Courtain his sword
And muttered therewithal a holy word.

Fair was the place, as though amidst of May, ^
Nor did the brown birds fear the sunny day,
For with their quivering song the air was sweet,
Thick grew the field-flowers underneath his feet,
And on his head the blossoms down did rain,
Yet mid these fair things slowly and with pain
He 'gan to go, yea, even wher his foot
First touched the flowery sod, to his heart's root
A coldness seemed to strike, and now each limb
Was growing stiff, his eyes waxed bleared and dim,
And all his stored-up memory 'gan to fail, .
Nor yet would his once mighty heart avail
For lamentations o'er his changed lot ;
Yet urged by some desire, he knew not what,
Along a little path 'twixt hedges sweet,
Drawn sword in hand, he dragged his faltering feet,
For what then seemed to him a weary way,
Whereon his steps he needs must often stay
And lean upon the mighty well-worn sword
That in those hands, grown old, for king or lord
Had small respect in glorious days long past.

But still he crept along, and at the last
Came to a gilded wicket, and through this .
Entered a garden fit for utmost bliss,

If that might last which needs must soon go by :
There 'gainst a tree he leaned, and with a sigh
He said, " O God, a sinner I have been,
And good it is that I these things have seen
Before I meet what Thou hast set apart
To cleanse the earthly folly from my heart ,
But who within this garden now can dwell
Wherein guilt first upon the world befell ?"

A little further yet he staggered on,
Till to a fountain-side at last he won,
O'er which two white-thorns their sweet blossoms shed,
There he sank down, and laid his weary head
Beside the mossy roots, and in a while
He slept, and dreamed himself within the isle ;
That splashing fount the weary sea did seem,
And in his dream the fair place but a dream ;
But when again to feebleness he woke
Upon his ears that heavenly music broke,
Not faint or far as in the isle it was,
But e'en as though the minstrels now did pass
Anigh his resting-place ; then fallen in doubt,
E'en as he might, he rose and gazed about,
Leaning against the hawthorn stem with pain ;
And yet his straining gaze was but in vain,
Death stole so fast upon him, and no more
Could he behold the blossoms as before,
No more the trees seemed rooted to the ground,
A heavy mist seemed gathering all around,
And in its heart some bright thing seemed to be,

And round his head there breathed deliciously
Sweet odours, and that music never ceased.
But as the weight of Death's strong hand increased
Again he sank adown, and Courtain's noise
Within the scabbard seemed a farewell voice
Sent from the world he loved so well of old,
And all his life was as a story told,
And as he thought thereof he 'gan to smile
E'en as a child asleep, but in a while
It was as though he slept, and sleeping dreamed,
For in his half-closed eyes a glory gleamed,
As though from some sweet face and golden hair,
And on his breast were laid soft hands and fair,
And a sweet voice was ringing in his ears,
Broken as if with flow of joyous tears ;

“Ogier, sweet friend, hast thou not tarried long?
Alas ! thine hundred years of strife and wrong !”
Then he found voice to say, “Alas ! dear Lord,
Too long, too long ; and yet one little word
Right many a year ago had brought me here.”
Then to his face that face was drawn anear,
He felt his head raised up and gently laid
On some kind knee, again the sweet voice said,
“Nay, Ogier, nay, not yet, not yet, dear friend !
• Who knoweth when our linked life shall end,
Since thou art come unto mine arms at last,
And all the turmoil of the world is past ?
Why do I linger ere I see thy face
As I desired it in that mourning place

So many years ago—so many years,
Thou knewest not thy love and all her fears?"

"Alas!" he said, "what mockery is this
That thou wilt speak to me of earthly bliss?
No longer can I think upon the earth,
Have I not done with all its grief and mirth?
Yes, I was Ogier once, but if my love
Should come once more my dying heart to move,
Then must she come from 'neath the milk-white walls
Whereon to-day the hawthorn blossom falls
Outside St. Omer's—art thou she? her name
I could remember once mid death and fame
Is clean forgotten now; but yesterday,
Meseems, our son, upon her bosom lay:
Baldwin the fair—what hast thou done with him
Since Charlot slew him? Ah, mine eyes wax dim;
Woman, forbear! wilt thou not let me die?
Did I forget thee in the days gone by?
Then let me die, that we may meet again!"

He tried to move from her, but all in vain,
For life had well-nigh left him, but withal
He felt a kiss upon his forehead fall,
And could not speak; he felt slim fingers fair
Move to his mighty sword-worn hand, and there
Set on some ring, and still he could not speak,
And once more sleep weighed down his eyelids weak.

BUT, ah ! what land was this he woke unto ?
What joy was this that filled his heart anew ?
Had he then gained the very Paradise ?
Trembling, he durst not at the first arise,
Although no more he felt the pain of eld,
Nor durst he raise his eyes that now beheld
Beside him the white flowers and blades of grass ;
He durst not speak, lest he some monster was.

But while he lay and hoped, that gentle voice
Once more he heard ; " Yea, thou mayst well rejoice
Thou livest still, my sweet, thou livest still,
Apart from every earthly fear and ill ;
Wilt thou not love me, who have wrought thee this,
That I like thee may live in double bliss ? "

Then Ogier rose up, nowise like to one
Whose span of earthly life is nigh outrun,
But as he might have risen in old days
To see the spears cleave the fresh morning haze ;
But, looking round, he saw no change there was
In the fair place wherethrough he first did pass.
Though all, grown clear and joyous to his eyes,
Now looked no worse than very Paradise ;
Behind him were the thorns, the fountain fair
Still sent its glittering stream forth into air,
And by its basin a fair woman stood,
And as their eyes met his renewèd blood
Rushed to his face ; with unused thoughts and sweet

And hurrying hopes, his heart began to beat.

The fairest of all creatures did she seem ;
So fresh and delicate you well might deem
That scarce for eighteen summers had she blessed
The happy, longing world ; yet, for the rest,
Within her glorious eyes such wisdom dwelt
A child before her had the wise man felt,
And with the pleasure of a thousand years
Her lips were fashioned to move joy or tears
Among the longing folk where she might dwell,
To give at last the kiss unspeakable.

In such wise was she clad as folk may be,
Who, for no shame of their humanity,
For no sad changes of the imperfect year,
Rather for added beauty, raiment wear ;
For, as the heat-foretelling grey-blue haze
Veils the green flowery morn of late May-days,
Her raiment veiled her ; where the bands did meet
That bound the sandals to her dainty feet,
Gems gleamed ; a fresh rose-wreath embraced her head,
And on her breast there lay a ruby red.

So with a supplicating look she turned
To meet the flame that in his own eyes burned,
And held out both her white arms lovingly,
As though to greet him as he drew anigh.
Stammering he said, " Who art thou ? how am I
So cured of all my evils suddenly,
That certainly I felt no mightier, when,
Amid the backward rush of beaten men,

About me drooped the axe-torn Oriflamme ?

Alas ! I fear that in some dream I am."

"Ogier," she said, "draw near, perchance it is
That such a name God gives unto our bliss ;
I know not, but if thou art such an one
As I must deem, all days beneath the sun
That thou hast had, shall be but dreams indeed
To those that I have given thee at thy need.
For many years ago beside the sea
When thou wert born, I plighted troth with thee :
Come near then, and make mirrors of mine eyes,
That thou mayst see what these my mysteries
Have wrought in thee ; surely but thirty years,
Passed amidst joy, thy new-born body bears,
Nor while thou art with me, and on this shore
Art still full-fed of love, shalt thou seem more.
Nay, love, come nigher, and let me take thine hand,
The hope and fear of many a warring land,
And I will show thee wherein lies the spell,
Whereby this happy change upon thee fell."

Like a shy youth before some royal love,
Close up to that fair woman did he move,
And their hands met ; yet to his changed voice
He dared not trust ; nay, scarcely could rejoice
E'en when her balmy breath he 'gan to feel,
And felt strange sweetness o'er his spirit steal
As her light raiment, driven by the wind,
Swept round him, and, bewildered and half-blind,

His lips the treasure of her lips did press,
And round him clung her perfect loveliness.

For one sweet moment thus they stood, and then
She drew herself from out his arms again,
And panting, lovelier for her love, did stand
Apart awhile, then took her lover's hand,
And, in a trembling voice, made haste to say,—

“ O Ogier, when thou camest here to-day,
I feared indeed, that in my sport with fate,
I might have seen thee e'en one day too late,
Before this ring thy finger should embrace ;
Behold it, love, and thy keen eyes may trace
Faint figures wrought upon the ruddy gold ;
My father dying gave it me, nor told
The manner of its making, but I know
That it can make thee e'en as thou art now
Despite the laws of God—shrink not from me
Because I give an impious gift to thee—
Has not God made me also, who do this ?
But I, who longed to share with thee my bliss,
Am of the fays, and live their changeless life,
And, like the gods of old, I see the strife
That moves the world, unmoved if so I will ;
For we the fruit, that teaches good and ill,
Have never touched like you of Adam's race ;
And while thou dwellest with me in this place
Thus shalt thou be—ah, and thou deem'st, indeed,
That thou shalt gain thereby no happy meed
Reft of the world's joys ? nor canst understand

- How thou art come into a happy land? —
Love, in thy world the priests of heaven still sing,
And tell thee of it many a joyous thing ;
But think'st thou, bearing the world's joy and pain,
Thou couldst live there? nay, nay, but born again
Thou wouldst be happy with the angels' bliss ;
And so with us no otherwise it is,
Nor hast thou cast thine old life quite away
Even as yet, though that shall be to-day.

“ But for the love and country thou hast won,
Know thou, that thou art come to Avallon,
That is both thine and mine ; and as for me,
Morgan le Fay men call me commonly
Within the world, but fairer names than this
I have for thee and me, 'twixt kiss and kiss.”

Ah, what was this ? and was it all in vain,
That she had brought him here this life to gain ?
For, ere her speech was done, like one turned blind
He watched the kisses of the wandering wind
Within her raiment, or as some one sees
The very best of well-wrought images
When he is blind with grief, did he behold
The wandering tresses of her locks of gold
• Upon her shoulders ; and no more he pressed
The hand that in his own hand lay at rest :
His eyes, grown dull with changing memories,
Could make no answer to her glorious eyes :
Cold waxed his heart, and weary and distraught,

With many a cast-by, hateful, dreary thought,
Unfinished in the old days ; and withal
He needs must think of what might chance to fall
In this life new-begun ; and good and bad
Tormented him, because as yet he had
A worldly heart within his frame made new,
And to the deeds that he was wont to do
Did his desires still turn. But she a while
Stood gazing at him with a doubtful smile,
And let his hand fall down ; but suddenly
Sounded sweet music from some close nearby,
And then she spoke again : " Come, love, with me,
That thou thy new life and delights mayst see."
And gently with that word she led him thence,
And though upon him now there fell a sense
Of dreamy and unreal bewilderment,
As hand in hand through that green place they went,
Yet therewithal a strain of tender love
A little yet his restless heart did move.

So through the whispering trees they came at last
To where a wondrous house a shadow cast
Across the flowers, and o'er the daisied grass
Before it, crowds of lovely folk did pass,
Playing about in carelessness and mirth,
Unshadowed by the doubtful deeds of earth ;
And from the midst a band of fair girls came,
With flowers and music, greeting him by name,
And praising him ; but ever like a dream

He could not break, did all to Ogier seem,
And he his old world did the more desire,
For in his heart still burned unquenched the fire,
That through the world of old so bright did burn :
Yet was he fain that kindness to return,
And from the depth of his full heart he sighed.

Then toward the house the lovely Queen did guide
His listless steps, and seemed to take no thought
Of knitted brow or wandering eyes distraught,
But still with kind love lighting up her face
She led him through the door of that fair place,
While round about them did the damsels press ;
And he was moved by all that loveliness
As one might be, who, lying half asleep
In the May morning, notes the light wind sweep
Over the tulip-beds : no more to him
Were gleaming eyes, red lips, and bodies slim,
Amidst that dream, although the first surprise
Of hurried love wherewith the Queen's sweet eyes
Had smitten him, still in his heart did stir.

And so at last he came, led on by her
Into a hall wherein a fair throne was,
And hand in hand thereto the twain did pass ;
And there she bade him sit, and when alone
He took his place upon the double throne,
She cast herself before him on her knees,
Embracing his, and greatly did increase
The shame and love that vexed his troubled heart :

But now a line of girls the crowd did part,
Lovelier than all, and Ogier could behold
One in their midst who bore a crown of gold
Within her slender hands and delicate ;
She, drawing nigh, beside the throne did wait
Until the Queen arose and took the crown,
Who then to Ogier's lips did stoop adown
And kissed him, and said, " Ogier, what were worth
Thy miserable days of strife on earth,
That on their ashes still thine eyes are turned ?"

Then, as she spoke these words, his changed heart
burned

With sudden memories, and thereto had he
Made answer, but she raised up suddenly
The crown she held and set it on his head,
" Ogier," she cried, " those troublous days are dead ;
Thou wert dead with them also, but for me ;
Turn unto her who wrought these things for thee !"

Then, as he felt her touch, a mighty wave
Of love swept o'er his soul, as though the grave
Did really hold his body ; from his seat
He rose to cast himself before her feet ;
But she clung round him, and in close embrace
The twain were locked amidst that thronging place.

Thenceforth new life indeed has Ogier won,
And in the happy land of Avallon
Quick glide the years o'er his unchanging head ;
There saw he many men the world thought dead.

Living like him in sweet forgetfulness
Of all the troubles that did once oppress
Their vainly-struggling lives—ah, how can I
Tell of their joy as though I had been nigh?
Suffice it that no fear of death they knew,
That there no talk there was of false or true,
Of right or wrong, for traitors came not there;
That everything was bright and soft and fair,
And yet they wearied not for any change,
Nor unto them did constancy seem strange.
Love knew they, but its pain they never had,
But with each other's joy were they made glad;
Nor were their lives wasted by hidden fire,
Nor knew they of the unfulfilled desire
That turns to ashes all the joys of earth,
Nor knew they yearning love amidst the dearth
Of kind and loving hearts to spend it on,
Nor dreamed of discontent when all was won;
Nor need they struggle after wealth and fame;
Still was the calm flow of their lives the same,
And yet, I say, they wearied not of it—
So did the promised days by Ogier flit.

THINK that a hundred years have now passed by,
Since ye beheld Ogier lie down to die
Beside the fountain; think that now ye are
In France, made dangerous with wasting war;

In Paris, where about each guarded gate,
Gathered in knots, the anxious people wait,
And press around each new-come man to learn
If Harfleur now the pagan wasters burn,
Or if the Rouen folk can keep their chain,
Or Pont de l'Arche unburnt still guards the Seine ?
Or if 'tis true that Andelys succour wants ?
That Vernon's folk are fleeing east to Mantes ?
When will they come ? or rather is it true
That a great band the Constable o'erthrew
Upon the marshes of the lower Seine,
And that their long ships, turning back again,
Caught by the high-raised waters of the bore
Were driven here and there and cast ashore ?

Such questions did they ask, and, as fresh men
Came hurrying in, they asked them o'er again,
And from scared folk, or fools, or ignorant,
Still got new lies, or tidings very scant.

But now amidst these men at last came one,
A little ere the setting of the sun,
With two stout men behind him, armed right well,
Who ever as they rode on, sooth to tell,
With doubtful eyes upon their master stared,
Or looked about like troubled men and scared.
And he they served was noteworthy indeed ;
Of ancient fashion were his arms and weed,
Rich past the wont of men in those sad times ;
His face was bronzed, as though by burning climes,

But lovely as the image of a god
Carved in the days before on earth Christ trod ;
But solemn were his eyes, and grey as glass,
And like to ruddy gold his fine hair was ;
A mighty man he was, and taller far
Than those who on that day must bear the war
The pagans waged : he by the warders stayed
Scarce looked on them, but straight their words obeyed
And showed his pass ; then, asked about his name
And from what city of the world he came,
Said, that men called him now the Ancient Knight,
That he was come midst the king's men to fight
From St. Omer's ; and as he spoke, he gazed
Down on the thronging street as one amazed,
And answered no more to the questioning
Of frightened folk of this or that sad thing ;
But, ere he passed on, turned about at last
And on the wondering guard a strange look cast,
And said, " St. Mary ! do such men as ye
Fight with the wasters from across the sea ?
Then, certes, are ye lost, however good
Your hearts may be ; not such were those who stood
Beside the Hammer-bearer years ago."

So said he, and as his fair armour shone
With beauty of a time long passed away,
So with the music of another day
His deep voice thrilled the awe-struck, listening folk.

Yet from the crowd a mocking voice outbroke,

That cried, "Be merry, masters, fear ye nought,
Surely good succour to our side is brought;
For here is Charlemaine come off his tomb
To save his faithful city from its doom."

"Yea," said another, "this is certain news,
Surely ye know how all the carvers use
To carve the dead man's image at the best,
That guards the place where he may lie at rest;
Wherefore this living image looks indeed,
Spite of his ancient tongue and marvellous weed,
To have but thirty summers."

At the name
Of Charlemaine, he turned to whence there came
The mocking voice, and somewhat knit his brow,
And seemed as he would speak, but scarce knew how;
So with a half-sigh soon sank back again
Into his dream, and shook his well-wrought rein,
And silently went on upon his way.

And this was Ogier: on what evil day
Has he then stumbled, that he needs must come,
Midst war and ravage, to the ancient home
Of his desires? did he grow weary then,
And wish to strive once more with foolish men
For worthless things? or is fair Avallon
Sunk in the sea, and all that glory gone?

Nay, thus it happed—One day she came to him
And said, "Ogier, thy name is waxen dim
Upon the world that thou rememberest not;

The heathen men are thick on many a spot
Thine eyes have seen, and which I love therefore ;
And God will give His wonted help no more.
Wilt thou, then, help ? canst thou have any mind
To give thy banner once more to the wind ?
Since greater glory thou shalt win for this
Than erst thou gathcredst ere thou cam'st to bliss :
For men are dwindled both in heart and frame,
Nor holds the fair land any such a name
As thine, when thou wert living midst thy peers ;
The world is worser for these hundred years."

From his calm eyes there gleamed a little fire,
And in his voice was something of desire,
To see the land where he was used to be,
As now he answered : " Nay, choose thou for me,
Thou art the wisest ; it is more than well
Within this peaceful place with thee to dwell :
Nor ill perchance in that old land to die,
If, dying, I keep not the memory
Of this fair life of ours." " Nay, nay," said she,
" As to thy dying, that shall never be,
Whiles that thou keep'st my ring—and now, behold,
I take from thee thy charmed crown of gold,
And thou wilt be the Ogier that thou wast
Ere on the loadstone rock thy ship was cast :
Yet thou shalt have thy youthful body still,
And I will guard thy life from every ill."

So was it done, and Ogier, armed right well,

Sleeping, was borne away by some strong spell,
And set upon the Flemish coast ; and thence
Turned to St. Omer's, with a doubtful sense
Of being in some wild dream, the while he knew
• That great delight forgotten was his duc,
That all which there might hap was of small worth.
• So on he went, and sometimes unto mirth
Did his attire move the country-folk,
But oftener when strange speeches from him broke
Concerning men and things for long years dead,
He filled the listeners with great awe and dread ;
For in such wild times as these people were
Are men soon moved to wonder and to fear.

• Now through the streets of Paris did he ride,
And at a certain hostel did abide
Throughout that night, and ere he went next day
He saw a book that on a table lay,
And opening it 'gan read in lazy mood :
But long before it in that place he stood,
Noting nought else ; for it did chronicle
The deeds of men of old he knew right well,
When they were living in the flesh with him :
Yea, his own deeds he saw, grown strange and dim
Already, and true stories mixed with lies, •
Until, with many thronging memories
Of those old days, his heart was so oppressed,
He 'gan to wish that he might lie at rest,
Forgetting all things : for indeed by this

Little remembrance had he of the bliss
That wrapped his soul in peaceful Avallon.

But his changed life he needs must carry on ;
For ye shall know the Queen was gathering men
To send unto the good King, who as then
In Rouen lay, beset by many a band
Of those who carried terror through the land,
And still by messengers for help he prayed :
Therefore a mighty muster was being made,
Of weak and strong, and brave and timorous,
Before the Queen anigh her royal house.
So thither on this morn did Ogier turn,
Some certain news about the war to learn ;
And when he came at last into the square,
And saw the ancient palace great and fair
Rise up before him as in other days,
And in the merry morn the bright sun's rays
Glittering on gathering helms and moving spears,
He 'gan to feel as in the long-past years,
And his heart stirred within him. Now the Queen
Came from within, right royally beseen,
And took her seat beneath a canopy,
With lords and captains of the war anigh ;
And as she came a mighty shout arose,
And round about began the knights to close,
Their oath of fealty there to swear anew,
And learn what service they had got to do.
But so it was, that some their shouts must stay

To gaze at Ogier as he took his way
Through the thronged place ; and quickly too he gat
Unto the place whereas the Lady sat,
For men gave place unto him, fearing him :
Eor not alone was he most huge of limb,
And dangerous, but something in his face,
As his calm eyes looked o'er the crowded place,
Struck men with awe ; and in the ancient days,
When men might hope alive on gods to gaze,
They would have thought, 'The gods yet love our town
And from the heavens have sent a great one down.'

Withal unto the throne he came so near,
That he the Queen's sweet measured voice could hear ;
And swiftly now within him wrought the change
That first he felt amid those faces strange ;
And his heart burned to taste the hurrying life
With such desires, such changing sweetness rife.
And yet, indeed, how should he live alone,
Who in the old past days such friends had known ?
Then he began to think of Caraheu,
Of Bellicent the fair, and once more knew
The bitter pain of rent and ended love.
But while with hope and vain regret he strove,
He found none 'twixt him and the Queen's high seat,
And, stepping forth, he knelt before her feet •
And took her hand to swear, as was the way
Of doing fealty in that ancient day,
And raised his eyes to hers ; as fair was she
As any woman of the world might be,

Full-limbed and tall, dark-haired, from her deep eyes,
The snare of fools, the ruin of the wise,
Love looked unchecked ; and now her dainty hand,
The well-knit holder of the golden wand,
Trembled in his, she cast her eyes adown,
And her sweet brow was knitted to a frown,
As he, the taker of such oaths of yore,
Now unto her all due obedience swore,
Yet gave himself no name ; and now the Queen,
Awed by his voice as other folk had been,
Yet felt a trembling hope within her rise
Too sweet to think of, and with love's surprise
Her cheek grew pale ; she said, "Thy style and name
Thou tellest not, nor what land of thy fame
Is glad ; for, certes, some land must be glad,
That in its bounds her house thy mother had."

"Lady," he said, "from what far land I come
I well might tell thee, but another home
Have I long dwelt in, and its name have I
Forgotten now, forgotten utterly
Who were my fellows, and what deeds they did ;
Therefore, indeed, shall my first name be hid
And my first country ; call me on this day
The Ancient Knight, and let me go my way."
He rose withal, for she her fingers fair
Had drawn aback, and on him 'gan to stare
As one afeard ; for something terrible
Was in his speech, and that she knew right well,
Who 'gan to love him, and to fear that she,

Shut out by some strange deadly mystery,
Should never gain from him an equal love ;
Yet, as from her high seat he 'gan to move,
She said, " O Ancient Knight, come presently,
When we have done this muster, unto me,
And thou shalt have thy charge and due command
For freeing from our foes this wretched land !"

Then Ogier made his reverence and went,
And somewhat could perceive of her intent ;
For in his heart life grew, and love with life
Grew, and therewith, 'twixt love and fame, was strife.

But, as he slowly gat him from the square,
Gazing at all the people gathered there,
A squire of the Queen's behind him came,
And breathless, called him by his new-coined name,
And bade him turn because the Queen now bade,
Since by the muster long she might be stayed,
That to the palace he should bring him straight,
Midst sport and play her coming back to wait ;
Then Ogier turned, nought loath, and with him went,
And to a postern-gate his steps he bent,
That Ogier knew right well in days of old ;
Worn was it now, and the bright hues and gold
Upon the shields above, with lapse of days,
Were faded much : but now did Ogier gaze
Upon the garden where he walked of yore,
Holding the hands that he should see no more ;
For all was changed except the palace fair,
That Charlemaine's own eyes had seen built there

Ere Ogier knew him ; there the squire did lead
The Ancient Knight, who still took little heed
Of all the things that by the way he said,
For all his thoughts were on the days long dead.

There in the painted hall he sat again,
And 'neath the pictured eyes of Charlemaine
He ate and drank, and felt it like a dream ;
And midst his growing longings yet might deem
That he from sleep should wake up presently
In some fair city on the Syrian sea,
Or on the brown rocks of the loadstone isle.
But fain to be alone, within a while
He gat him to the garden, and there passed
By wondering squires and damsels, till at last,
Far from the merry folk who needs must play,
If on the world were coming its last day,
He sat him down, and through his mind there ran
Faint thoughts of that day, when, outworn and wan,
He lay down by the fountain-side to die.
But when he strove to gain clear memory
Of what had happed since on the isle he lay
Waiting for death, a hopeless castaway,
Thought, failing him, would rather bring again
His life among the peers of Charlemaine,
And vex his soul with hapless memories ;
Until at last, worn out by thought of these,
And hopeless striving to find what was true,
And pondering on the deeds he had to do
Ere he returned, whereto he could not tell,

Sweet sleep upon his wearied spirit fell.
And on the afternoon of that fair day,
Forgetting all, beneath the trees he lay.

Meanwhile the Queen, affairs of state being done,
Went through the gardens with one dame alone
Seeking for Ogier, whom at last she found
Laid sleeping on the daisy-sprinkled ground,
Dreaming, I know not what, of other days.
Then on him for a while the Queen did gaze,
Drawing sweet poison from the lovely sight,
Then to her fellow turned, "The Ancient Knight—
What means he by this word of his?" she said;
'He were well mated with some lovely maid
Just pondering on the late-heard name of love."

"Softly, my lady, he begins to move."
Her fellow said, a woman old and grey;
"Look now, his arms are of another day;
None know him or his deeds; thy squire just said
He asked about the state of men long dead;
I fear what he may be; look, seest thou not
That ring that on one finger he has got,
Where figures strange upon the gold are wrought:
God grant that he from hell has not been brought
For our confusion, in this doleful war,
Who surely in enough of trouble are
Without such help;" then the Queen turned aside
Awhile, her drawn and troubled face to hide,
For lurking dread this speech within her stirred;

But yet she said, "Thou sayest a foolish word,
This man is come against our enemies
To fight for us." Then down upon her knees
Fell the old woman by the sleeping knight,
And from his hand she drew with fingers light
The wondrous ring, and scarce again could rise
Ere 'neath the trembling Queen's bewildered eyes
The change began ; his golden hair turned white,
His smooth cheek wrinkled, and his breathing light
Was turned to troublous struggling for his breath,
And on his shrunk lips lay the hand of death ;
And, scarce less pale than he, the trembling Queen
Stood thinking on the beauty she had seen
And longed for but a little while ago,
Yet with her terror still her love did grow,
And she began to weep as though she saw
Her beauty e'en to such an ending draw.
And 'neath her tears waking he oped his eyes,
And strove to speak, but nought but gasping sighs
His lips could utter ; then he tried to reach
His hand to them, as though he would beseech
The gift of what was his : but all the while
The crone gazed on them with an evil smile,
Then holding toward the Queen that wondrous ring,
She said, "Why weep'st thou ? having this fair thing,
Thou, losing nought the beauty that thou hast,
May'st watch the vainly struggling world go past,
Thyself unchanged." The Queen put forth her hand
And took the ring, and there awhile did stand

And strove to think of it, but still in her
Such all-absorbing longings love did stir,
So young she was, of death she could not think
Or what a cup eld gives to man to drink ;
Yet on her finger had she set the ring
When now the life that hitherto did cling
To Ogier's heart seemed fading quite away,
And scarcely breathing with shut eyes he lay
Then, kneeling down, she murmured piteously,
" Ah, wilt thou love me if I give it thee,
And thou grow'st young again ? what should I do
If with the eyes thou thus shalt gain anew
Thou shouldst look scorn on me ?" But with that word
The hedge behind her, by the west wind stirred
Cast fear into her heart of some one nigh,
And therewith on his finger hastily
She set the ring, then rose and stood apart
A little way, and in her doubtful heart
With love and fear was mixed desire of life.

But standing so, a look with great scorn rife
The elder woman, turning, cast on her,
Pointing to Ogier, who began to stir ;
She looked, and all she erst saw now did seem
To have been nothing but a hideous dream,
As fair and young he rose from off the ground
And cast a dazed and puzzled look around,
Like one just waked from sleep in some strange place ;
But soon his grave eyes rested on her face,
And turned yet graver seeing her so pale,

And that her eyes were pregnant with some tale
Of love and fear ; she 'neath his eyes the while
Forced her pale lips to semblance of a smile,
And said, " O Ancient Knight, thou sleepest then ?
While through this poor land range the heathen men,
Unmet of any but my King and Lord :
Nay, let us see the deeds of thine old sword."

" Queen," said he, " bid me then unto this work,
And certes I behind no wall would lurk,
Nor send for succour, while a scanty folk
Still followed after me to break the yoke :
I pray thee grace for sleeping, and were fain
That I might rather never sleep again
Then have such wretched dreams as I e'en now
Have waked from."

Lovelier she seemed to grow
Unto him as he spoke ; fresh colour came
Into her face, as though for some sweet shame,
While she with tearful eyes beheld him so,
That somewhat even must his burnt cheek glow.
His heart beat faster. But again she said,
" Nay, will dreams burden such a mighty head ?
Then may I too have pardon for a dream ;
Last night in sleep I saw thee, who didst seem
To be the King of France ; and thou and I
Were sitting at some great festivity
Within the many-peopled gold-hung place."

The blush of shame was gone as on his face
She gazed, and saw him read her meaning clear

And knew that no cold words she had to fear,
But rather that for softer speech he yearned.
Therefore, with love alone her smooth cheek burned ;
Her parted lips were hungry for his kiss,
She trembled at the near approaching bliss ;

• Nathless, she checked her love a little while,
Because she felt the old dame's curious smile
Upon her, and she said, " O Ancient Knight,
If I then read my last night's dream aright,
Thou art come here our very help to be,
Perchance to give my husband back to me ;
Come then, if thou this land art fain to save,
And show the wisdom thou must surely have
Unto my council ; I will give thee then
'What charge I may among my valiant men ;
And certes thou wilt do so well herein,
That, ere long, something greater shalt thou win :
Come, then, deliverer of my throne and land,
And let me touch for once thy mighty hand
With these weak fingers."

As she spoke, she met
His eager hand, and all things did forget
But for one moment, for too wise were they
To cast the coming years of joy away ;
Then with her other hand her gown she raised •
And led him thence, and o'er her shoulder gazed
At her old follower with a doubtful smile,
As though to say, " Be wise, I know thy guile !"
But slowly she behind the lovers walked,

Muttering, "So be it ! thou shalt not be balked.
Of thy desire ; be merry ! I am wise,
Nor will I rob thee of thy Paradise
For any other than myself ; and thou
May'st even happen to have had enow
Of this new love, before I get the ring,
And I may work for thee no evil thing."

Now ye shall know, that the old chronicle,
Wherein I read all this, doth duly tell
Of all the gallant deeds that Ogier did,
There may ye read them ; nor let me be chid
If I therefore say little of these things,
Because the thought of Avallon still clings
Unto my heart, and scarcely can I bear
To think of that long, dragging, useless year,
Through which, with dulled and glimmering memory,
Ogier was grown content to live and die
Like other men ; but this I have to say,
That in the council chamber on that day
The Old Knight showed his wisdom well enow,
While fainter still with love the Queen did grow
Hearing his words, beholding his grey eyes
Flashing with fire of warlike memories ;
Yea, at the last he seemed so wise indeed
That she could give him now the charge, to lead
One wing of the great army that set out
From Paris' gates, midst many a wavering shout,
Midst trembling prayers, and unchecked wails and tears,

And slender hopes and unresisted fears.

Now ere he went, upon his bed he lay,
 Newly awakened at the dawn of day,
 , Gathering perplexed thoughts of many a thing,
 When, midst the carol that the birds did sing
 Unto the coming of the hopeful sun,
 He heard a sudden lovesome song begun
 'Twixt two young voices in the garden green,
 That seemed indeed the farewell of the Queen.

SONG.

HÆC.

*In the white-flowered hawthorn brake,
 Love, be merry for my sake;
 Twine the blossoms in my hair,
 Kiss me where I am most fair—
 Kiss me, love! for who knoweth
 What thing cometh after death?*

ILLE.

*Nay, the garlanded gold hair
 Hides thee where thou art most fair;
 Hides the rose-tinged hills of snow—
 Ah, sweet love, I have thee now!
 Kiss me, love! for who knoweth
 What thing cometh after death?*

HÆC.

*Shall we weep for a dead day,
Or set Sorrow in our way ?
Hidden by my golden hair,
Wilt thou weep that sweet days wear ?
Kiss me, love ! for who knoweth
What thing cometh after death ?*

ILLE.

*Weep, O Love, the days that flit,
Now, while I can feel thy breath ;
Then may I remember it
Sad and old, and near my death.
Kiss me, love ! for who knoweth
What thing cometh after death ?*

Soothed by the pleasure that the music brought
And sweet desire, and vague and dreamy thought
Of happiness it seemed to promise him,
He lay and listened till his eyes grew dim,
And o'er him 'gan forgetfulness to creep
Till in the growing light he lay asleep,
Nor woke until the clanging trumpet-blast
Had summoned him all thought away to cast :
Yet one more joy of love indeed he had
Ere with the battle's noise he was made glad ;
For, as on that May morning forth they rode
And passed before the Queen's most fair abode,

There at a window was she waiting them
In fair attire with gold in every hem,
And as the Ancient Knight beneath her passed
A wreath of flowering white-thorn down she cast,
And looked farewell to him, and forth he set
• Thinking of all the pleasure he should get
From love and war, forgetting Avallon
And all that lovely life so lightly won ;
Yea, now indeed the earthly life o'erpast
Ere on the loadstone rock his ship was cast
Was waxing dim, nor yet at all he learned
To 'scape the fire that erst his heart had burned.
And he forgot his deeds, forgot his fame,
Forgot the letters of his ancient name
'As one waked fully shall forget a dream,
That once to him a wondrous tale did seem

Now I, though writing here no chronicle
E'en as I said, must nathless shortly tell
That, ere the army Rouen's gates could gain
By a broad arrow had the King been slain,
And helpless now the wretched country lay
Beneath the yoke, until the glorious day
When Ogier fell at last upon the foe,
And scattered them as helplessly as though
They had been beaten men without a name :
So when to Paris town once more he came
Few folk the memory of the King did keep
Within their hearts, and if the folk did weep

At his returning, 'twas for joy indeed
That such a man had risen at their need
To work for them so great deliverance,
And loud they called on him for King of France.

But if the Queen's heart were the more a-flame
For all that she had heard of his great fame,
I know not ; rather with some hidden dread
Of coming fate, she heard her lord was dead,
And her false dream seemed coming true at last,
For the clear sky of love seemed overcast
With clouds of God's great judgments, and the fear
Of hate and final parting drawing near.

So now when he before her throne did stand
Amidst the throng as saviour of the land,
And she her eyes to his kind eyes did raise,
And there before all her own love must praise ,
Then did she fall a-weeping, and folk said,
" See, how she sorrows for the newly dead !
Amidst our joy she needs must think of him ,
Let be, full surely shall her grief wax dim
And she shall wed again."

So passed the year,
While Ogier set himself the land to clear
Of broken remnants of the heathen men,
And at the last, when May-time came again,
Must he be crowned King of the twice-saved land,
And at the altar take the fair Queen's hand
And wed her for his own. And now by this

Had he forgotten clean the woe and bliss
Of his old life, and still was he made glad
As other men ; and hopes and fears he had
As others, and bethought him not at all
Of what strange days upon him yet should fall
When he should live and these again be dead

Now drew the time round when he should be wed,
And in his palace on his bed he lay
Upon the dawning of the very day :
'Twixt sleep and waking was he, and could hear
E'en at that hour, through the bright morn and clear,
The hammering of the folk who toiled to make
Some well-wrought stages for the pageant's sake,
Though hardly yet the sparrows had begun
To twitter o'er the coming of the sun,
Nor through the palace did a creature move.

There in the sweet entanglement of love
Midst languid thoughts of greater bliss he lay,
Remembering no more of that other day
Than the hot noon remembereth of the night,
Than summer thinketh of the winter white.

In that sweet hour he heard a voice that cried,
"Ogier, Ogier !" then, opening his eyes wide,
And rising on his elbow, gazed around,
And strange to him and empty was the sound
Of his own name ; " Whom callest thou ? " he said.
" For I, the man who lies upon this bed,
Am Charles of France, and shall be King to-day,

But in a year that now is past away
The Ancient Knight they called me : who is this,
Thou callest Ogier, then, what deeds are his ?
And who art thou ?" But at that word a sigh,
As of one grieved, came from some place anigh
His bed-side, and a soft voice spake again,
" This Ogier once was great amongst great men ;
To Italy a helpless hostage led ;
He saved the King when the false Lombard fled,
Bore forth the Oriflamme and gained the day ;
Charlot he brought back, whom men led away,
And fought a day-long fight with Caraheu.
The ravager of Rome his right hand slew ;
Nor did he fear the might of Charlemaine,
Who for a dreary year beset in vain
His lonely castle ; yet at last caught then,
And shut in hold, needs must he come again
To give an unhop'd great deliverance
Unto the burdened helpless land of France :
Denmark he gained thereafter, and he wore
The crown of England drawn from trouble sore ;
At Tyre then he reigned, and Babylon
With mighty deeds he from the foemen won ;
And when scarce aught could give him greater fame,
He left the world still thinking on his name.

" These things did Ogier, and these things didst thou,
Nor will I call thee by a new name now
Since I have spoken words of love to thee—
Ogier, Ogier, dost thou remember me,

E'en if thou hast no thought of that past time
Before thou camest to our happy clime?"

As this was said, his mazed eyes saw indeed
A lovely woman clad in dainty weed
Beside his bed, and many a thought was stirred
Within his heart by that last plaintive word,
Though nought he said, but waited what should come.
"Love," said she, "I am here to bring thee home;
Well hast thou done all that thou cam'st to do,
And if thou bidest here, for something new
Will folk begin to cry, and all thy fame
Shall then avail thee but for greater blame;
Thy love shall cease to love thee, and the earth
Thou lovest now shall be of little worth
While still thou keepest life, abhorring it.
Behold, in men's lives that so quickly flit
Thus is it, how then shall it be with thee,
Who some faint image of eternity
Hast gained through me?—alas, thou heedest not!
On all these changing things thine heart is hot—
Take then this gift that I have brought from far,
And then may'st thou remember what we are;
The lover and the loved from long ago."

He trembled, and more memory seemed to grow
Within his heart as he beheld her stand,
Holding a glittering crown in her right hand:
"Ogier," she said, "arise and do on thee
The emblems of thy worldly sovereignty,

For we must pass o'er many a sea this morn."

He rose, and in the glittering tunic worn
By Charlemaine he clad himself, and took
The ivory hand, that Charlemaine once shook
Over the people's head in days of old ;
Then on his feet he set the shoes of gold,
And o'er his shoulders threw the mantle fair,
And set the gold crown on his golden hair :
Then on the royal chair he sat him down,
As though he deemed the elders of the town
Should come to audience ; and in all he seemed
To do these things e'en as a man who dreamed

And now adown the Seine the golden sun
Shone out, as toward him drew that lovely one
And took from off his head the royal crown,
And, smiling, on the pillow laid it down
And said, " Lie there, O crown of Charlemaine,
Worn by a mighty man, and worn in vain,
Because he died, and all the things he did
Were changed before his face by earth was hid ,
A better crown I have for my love's head,
Whereby he yet shall live, when all are dead
His hand has helped." Then on his head she set
The wondrous crown, and said, " Forget, forget !
Forget these weary things, for thou hast much
Of happiness to think of."

At that touch

He rose, a happy light gleamed in his eyes ;

And smitten by the rush of memories,
He stammered out, "O love! how came we here?
What do we in this land of Death and Fear?
Have I not been from thee a weary while?
Let us return—I dreamed about the isle;
I dreamed of other years of strife and pain,
Of new years full of struggles long and vain."

She took him by the hand and said, "Come, love.
I am not changed;" and therewith did they move
Unto the door, and through the sleeping place
Swiftly they went, and still was Ogier's face
Turned on her beauty, and no thought was his
Except the dear returning of his bliss.

But at the threshold of the palace-gate
That opened to them, she awhile did wait,
And turned her eyes unto the rippling Seine
And said, "O love, behold it once again!"
He turned, and gazed upon the city grey
Smit by the gold of that sweet morn of May;
He heard faint noises as of wakening folk
As on their heads his day of glory broke;
He heard the changing rush of the swift stream
Against the bridge-piers. All was grown a dream.
His work was over, his reward was come,
Why should he loiter longer from his home?

A little while she watched him silently,
Then beckoned him to follow with a sigh,
And, raising up the raiment from her feet.

Across the threshold stepped into the street ;
One moment on the twain the low sun shone,
And then the place was void, and they were gone
How I know not ; but this I know indeed,
That in whatso great trouble or sore need
The land of France since that fair day has been,
No more the sword of Ogier has she seen.

' **S**UCH was the tale he told of Avallon,
E'en such an one as in days past had won
His youthful heart to think upon the quest ;
But to those old hearts nigh in reach of rest,
Not much to be desired now it seemed—
Perchance the heart that of such things had dreamed
Had found no words in this death-laden tongue
We speak on earth, wherewith they might be sung ;
Perchance the changing years that changed his heart
E'en in the words of that old tale had part, {
Changing its sweet to bitter, to despair
The foolish hope that once had glittered there—
Or think, that in some bay of that far home
They then had sat, and watched the green waves come
Up to their feet with many promises ;
Or the light wind midst blossom-laden trees,
In the sweet Spring had weighted many a word
Of no worth now, and many a hope had stirred
Long dead for ever.

Howsoe'er that be
Among strange folk they now sat quietly,
As though that tale with them had nought to do,
As though its hopes and fears were something new.

But though, indeed, the outworn, dwindled band
Had no tears left for that once longed-for land.
The very wind must moan for their decay,
And from the sky, grown dull, and low, and grey.
Cold tears must fall upon the lonely field,
That such fair golden hopes erewhile did yield,
And on the blackening woods, wherein the doves
Sat silent now, forgetful of their loves.
Yet, since a little life at least was left,
They were not yet of every joy bereft,
For long ago was past the agony,
Midst which they found that they indeed must die,
And now well-nigh as much their pain was past
As though death's veil already had been cast
Over their heads—so, midst some little mirth,
They watched the dark night hide the gloomy earth.

